S Y M B O L I S M I N D I C K E N S

by

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C O N T E N T S

P R E F A C E

To treat of Dickens's symbolism is not to break new ground, for this aspect of his work is not any sensational find. Almost all the writers, who have discussed his novels over the last decade or so, have emphasized their symbolic quality. But, important and valuable as these appreciations are, they do not appear to look for a general basis for this singular and, seemingly, abrupt phenomenon in the early Victorian novel. A student of literature would, however, prefer to see the Dickensian symbols emerge and grow and mature according to the natural logic of art. This study attempts to establish such a general basis, and develop such a natural logic, in as full a view of Dickens's life, work and time as a doctoral dissertation would admit of.

Among the formative influences on Dickens, Carlyle's is the one particularly stressed here, and, in view of some fresh evidence in Sketches by Boz, it can perhaps be pushed as far back as the summer of 1836.

A.O.J. Cockshut's Imagination of Charles Dickens and C.G.L. Du Cann's Love-Lives of Charles Dickens appeared too late to be of help to me. I believe I have been unlucky in missing them.

I remain deeply indebted to my supervisor, Professor John Butt, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. Kindness, sympathy, encouragement, guidance - all these have come from him, and come in full measure. It was no wonder then that I was not overwhelmed by the gigantic task of probing into almost the entire mass of Dickens's writings.

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L I S T OF A B B R E V I A T I O N S

A - Letter-titles of Dickens's works used after quoted extracts.

SB	-	Sketches by Boz
PP	-	Pickwick Papers
OT	-	Oliver Twist
MP	-	The Mudfog Papers
NN	-	Nicholas Nickleby
MHC	-	Master Humphrey's Clock
OCS	-	The Old Curiosity Shop
BR	-	Barnaby Rudge
AN	-	American Notes
MC	-	Martin Chuzzlewit
PI	-	Pictures from Italy
DS	-	Dombey and Son
DC	-	David Copperfield
BH	-	Bleak House
HT	-	Hard Times
LD	-	Little Dorrit
TTC	-	A Tale of Two Cities
GE	-	Great Expectations
OMF	-	Our Mutual Friend
MED	-	The Mystery of Edwin Drood

B - Cue-titles of works frequently referred to.

Butt and Tillotson	-	John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (1957).
Forster	-	John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, edited by J.W.T. Ley (1928). Reference is by book, [illegible] section, and page.
Letters	-	The Letters of Charles Dickens, edited by Walter Dexter (3 vols., 1938, The Nonesuch Dickens). Reference is by volume and page.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

In the early nineteen-twenties T.S. Eliot pointed out the need of giving the English, Irish, and American provincialities a common European denominator. The critic, he urged, should have the power

> 'to discern what, in any work of literary art, takes its place, through its expression of the genius of its own language, in European literature, and what is of purely local importance. (In the case of such a writer as Dickens, for example, this dissociation remains to be performed.)'[1]

It is only a parenthetical reference, but it does reflect the obvious neglect which the high-brow critic had meted out to Dickens. Two more decades passed, but the position did not change in any real sense so that Edmund Wilson had to open his important study of Dickens with a spirited protest:

> 'Of all the great English writers, Charles Dickens has received in his own country the scantiest serious attention from either biographers, scholars, or critics. He has become for the English middle class so much one of the articles of their creed - a familiar joke, a favourite dish, a Christmas ritual - that it is difficult for British pundits to see in him the great artist and social critic he was.'[2]

He therefore set out to show that there were in Dickens's work 'a complexity and a depth' not to be easily gauged, and 'an intellectual and artistic interest which makes Dickens loom very large in the whole perspective of the literature of the West.'

What T.S. Eliot had suggested casually, Edmund Wilson stated as firm conviction, and the truth of it was borne out by his own essay and by the studies of Dickens that were to follow. Henceforth biographers, scholars, and critics, in England and America and on

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Three Provincialities', The Tyro (London, 1922), No. 2, p. 12.
2. Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges', The Wound and the Bow, (1942), p. 1.

the Continent, were to come to grips with his life and work as never before. One phase of this extraordinary activity is the outlining of the topical element in Dickens[1] and the investigation of the way he transformed it into something perennially rich, and the emphasis finally appears to fall on one feature, i.e., his symbolism.[2] Incidentally this line of inquiry leads to that 'dissociation' of the 'European' or 'Western' from the 'English' or 'provincial' in Dickens to which T.S. Eliot referred and which Edmund Wilson proceeded to effect. Closely linked to this, are the other phases of the recent researches which lend additional charm to the newly exposed feature. Thus the exceedingly valuable knowledge of Dickens's behind-the-scenes labours[3] only determines the degree of consciousness with which he realized his artistic effects, and the intimate details of his private life[4] only give a keener edge to their symbolic significance.

When Edmund Wilson sought to correlate Dickens's work to the wider 'Western' context, he naturally thought in terms of an objective standard:

> 'Chesterton asserted that time would show that Dickens was not merely one of the Victorians, but incomparably the greatest English writer of his time; and Shaw coupled his name with that of Shakespeare. It is the conviction of the present writer that both these judgments were justified. Dickens - though he cannot of course pretend to the rank where Shakespeare has few companions - was nevertheless the greatest dramatic writer that

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1. This was set in proper perspective in general by Humphry House in The Dickens World, and in particular by John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson in Dickens at Work. Also see John Butt: 'The Topicality of Little Dorrit', University of Toronto Quarterly, October 1959.
2. Almost every late study of Dickens has treated of this.
3. Pioneered by John Butt, this approach has been made in collaboration with Kathleen Tillotson in Dickens at Work.
4. Edgar Johnson in Charles Dickens, His Tragedy and Triumph and Ada Nisbet in Dickens and Ellen Ternan have produced new authentic evidence, and partly supported Thomas Wright's sensational theories of the mid-nineteen thirties.

the English had had since Shakespeare.'[1]

This comparison with Shakespeare was nothing new. Dickens's own contemporaries had talked in that vein. Mary Russell Mitford - though like a few others she was later to anathematize the novelist for his social criticism - believed his view of humanity was 'a Shakespearean view'. Walter Savage Landor declared that Dickens was 'with Shakespeare the greatest of English writers, though indeed his women are superior to Shakespeare's,' and that 'No one of our poets comes near him.' Lord [illegible] Jeffrey asserted that there had been 'nothing so good as Nell since Cordelia.' However, years later, when sophistication came with decadence, things appeared to change. Oscar Wilde said that only one with a heart of stone would read the death of Nell without laughing. But Tolstoy from afar paid his tribute by saying that the story of Little Nell and her grandfather was greater art than King Lear. And this conflicting critical opinion continued to flow, though of late in more general channels, so that if Dickens's characters appeared 'flat' to E.M. Forster because only a single sentence could guide their entire destiny, in T.S. Eliot's view they belonged to poetry, 'like figures of Dante or Shakespeare, in that a single phrase...may be enough to set them wholly before us.'

How valid these claims of comparison with Shakespeare are, is not the question here. The point that really matters is that the fact of comparison is emphatically and insistently there, and that the basis of comparison lies in the dramatic and poetic excellence of Dickens's creations - at least that is the impression which

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1. 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges'. See fn. 2, p. 1.

Landor's and Eliot's opinions jointly give. Thus Edmund Wilson had only trenchantly put what had been often repeated before, but happily he also substantiated the view by giving his own treatment of Dickens a sufficiently symbolic turn. As suggested above, it was along this line that most of the Dickensian criticism after World War II moved. F.R. Leavis has admitted Dickens to the hall of 'Great Tradition' only by the backdoor, but even he has had to concede:

> "[Dickens] doesn't write 'poetic prose'; he writes with a poetic force of evocation, registering with the responsiveness of a genius of verbal expression what he so sharply sees and feels. In fact, by texture, imaginative mode, symbolic method, and the resulting concentration, Hard Times affects us as belonging with formally poetic works."
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> "Hard Times is a poetic work. It suggests that the genius of the writer may fairly be described as that of a poetic dramatist, and that, in our preconceptions about 'the novel', we may miss, within the field of fictional prose, possibilities of concentration and flexibilities in the interpretation of life such as we associate with Shakespearean drama."
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> 'the packed richness of Hard Times is almost incredibly varied, and not all the quoting I have indulged in suggests it adequately. The final stress may fall on Dickens's command of word, phrase, rhythm and image; in ease and range there is surely no greater master of English except Shakespeare. This comes back to saying that Dickens is a great poet: his endless resource in felicitously varied expression is an extraordinary responsiveness to life.'[1]

Not only do these passages further confirm the basis of comparison between Shakespeare and Dickens, but they contain some very revealing hints for a deeper appraisal of Dickens's art. Nevertheless, Leavis's position is anomalous. For agreeing that the genius of Dickens is 'that of a poetic dramatist', that 'his endless resource in felicitously varied expression is an extraordinary responsiveness to life', and that 'the final stress may

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1. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, (1948) See 'Hard Times: An Analytic Note', ff. 234, 241 and 246.

fall on Dickens's command of word, phrase, rhythm and image', how is one to subscribe to the view that all these qualities found expression once in a life-time, i.e., only for some eighteen weeks of the spring and summer of 1854 in more than thirty-six years of intense literary activity extending from 1834 to 1870? Is a work of art of such excellence as Hard Times created through a process of gradual development leading to a consummation that might stay, or is it got by stumbling upon a lucky recipe that would not do the trick again? Surely 'a poetic dramatist' approaching the Shakespearean standard deserves better. K.J. Fielding rightly says that 'Leavis does not seem to see that his remarks on Hard Times are capable of a much wider application to Dickens's works'.[1] In fact John Forster took the correct view when he wrote about Sketches by Boz:

> ' [Dickens] gave, in subsequent writings, so much more perfect form and fullness to everything it contained, that he did not care to credit himself with the marvel of having yet so early anticipated so much. But the first sprightly runnings of his genius are undoubtedly here...'[2]

Seen in this light Hard Times falls in place among the writings subsequent to the Sketches so that some of them may even have received 'more perfect form and fullness' than Hard Times itself. It may therefore be justifiable to regard the whole of Dickens's work as a proper field of study in so far as its resources to transcend space and time in the Shakespearean way are concerned. This would indeed entail a gigantic task unless the line of inquiry was shorn of all possible complexities. Perhaps the project will become more

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1. K.J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction, (1958), Ch. VIII, p.131.
2. Forster, I, V, 76.

manageable if a treatment of Dickens as a poetic dramatist using symbolic methods is undertaken. In fact the latest trends in Dickensian criticism appear to dictate which a course, and fortunately this is also capable of including what has been suggested above. For stated in simpler and more definite terms the question becomes: how does Dickens give his work, rooted deep as it is in the life of his own country and time, a meaning larger than English and a significance higher than Victorian? And the answer takes the form: by dressing his command of word, phrase, and image to the advantage of his symbolism. In other words, the problem is to trace in his writings the symbolic process in embryo, to mark its gradual development, to determine its scope and function in its full play, to explain it in terms of personal and social history, and to appreciate its force and quality in the context of universal values.

2

The central subject of this study being Dickens's symbolism, it is not irrelevant to ask what the appellation 'poetic dramatist' has to do with a novelist. Following the common textbook distinctions one may say that when character and action are inseparably knit together in a prose narrative, the dramatic novel is born, and further that when the writer throws an emotional colouring over the whole so that even its non-conversational parts are evocative of feeling rather than productive of incident, he makes a novelist who is also a poetic dramatist. This clarification may be right enough in its own way, but it sounds too superficial to be of any real use

in a discussion of symbolism. It is perhaps necessary to descend to fundamentals, and accordingly the hiatus between the drama and the novel, blank verse and prose disappears when, for instance, Dickens's creations are called poetic in the same way as Shakespeare's. After all, what is it, one is tempted to ask, which so transmutes Spectacle, Character, Plot, Diction, Melody, and Thought - to employ the Aristotelian terminology of Tragedy - that the Victorian can stand beside the Elizabethan? The answer may well be in Aristotle's words again:

> 'It is a great thing, indeed, to make a proper use of these poetical forms, as also of compounds and strange words. But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the only thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.'[1]

While there can be no disagreement with John Middleton Murry, when he says that Shakespeare is the greatest of all masters of metaphor,[2] it is not without interest to hear a 'confession' of Dickens in the matter of an unusual idea:

> 'I dare say I pet it as if it were a spoilt child... I work slowly and with great care, and never give way to invention recklessly, but constantly restrain it... I think it is my infirmity to fancy or perceive relations in things which are not apparent generally.'[3]

What Dickens, apologetically it seems, owns as a weakness Aristotle characterizes as 'a sign of genius'. This uncontrollable power of seeing the underlying 'similarity in dissimilars' then forms the real basis of comparison between Shakespeare and Dickens, and, as

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1. Poetics, trans. Ingram Bywater (1920), p. 78.
2. Middleton Murry, Countries of the Mind (Second Series), (1931). See the chapter, 'Metaphor', pp. 1–16.
3. Forster, IX, I, 721.

suggested by T.S. Eliot, between them both and Dante. In the world of metaphor the Victorian meets the Elizabethan, and both together the Medieval, and so do England and Italy.

Dispensing with the finer technicalities of rhetoric, it may be held that simile, metaphor, personification, image, emblem, symbol, allegory, all come of the same illustrious family of comparison, and it may be urged again that the one effect, which is above all expected of each of them, is that which Aristotle expects of one of them, metaphor, and that is vividness, the power of 'setting things before the eyes'.[1] But of course this does not imply only visual comprehension. Middleton Murry says:

> "The word 'image', precisely because it is used to cover both metaphor and simile, can be used to point towards their fundamental identity..."
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> 'The image may be visual, may be auditory, may refer back to any primary physical experience...or it may be wholly psychological, the reference of one emotional or intellectual experience to another... The essential is simply that there should be that intuitive perception of similarity between dissimilars of which Aristotle speaks.'[2]

'Metaphor' and 'image' may be interchangeable for all practical purposes, but how can this vividness of metaphor or imagery best bring about artistic communication? This is explained by Coleridge:

> 'Images, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only in so far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant; or lastly when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit.'

Obviously it is in this sense that the power and excellence of

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1. Rhetoric, trans. Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb, (1909), p. 171.
2. See fn. 2, p. 7.

Dickens's imagery rise to the Shakespearean level. Atmosphere, setting, scene, character, speech, and action, in a novel by the one, as in a play by the other, are informed with an over-all sense of harmony that is both alive and compelling, because it operates through an imagery which is born of a full and free responsiveness to life, but which is controlled by a strong individual view of humanity.

However, as suggested earlier, such mastery of image cannot be a sudden find; it can only be the culmination of a gradual process of development. And it is this very process which is to be traced in Dickens's writings.

The point in investigating the nature of Dickens's title of 'a poetic dramatist', especially in the neighbourhood of Shakespeare, was to narrow down yet further the field of inquiry, and it is gained the moment the distinction between the drama and the novel is restored. Whereas Shakespeare's imagery is conditioned to operate in dialogue, Dickens's is free to operate, in fact prefers to operate, outside dialogue. This study seeks to establish the view that his symbolism largely grows where his rare sense of comparison blends with his extraordinary power of description. In other words, the non-conversational parts of his novels will be the main concern of these pages.

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Following Aristotle one may say that vividness is the first requisite of creative imagery, and this naturally depends upon the writer's intensity of perception, for he cannot put more life into an image than it displaces in himself. Again, how deeply it will move the reader depends upon how close he is to the level of experience to which it refers him. That is, the more sensuous the terms of comparison, the stronger and more immediate their appeal, and more lasting too. The writer cannot contract the command of image from others, because it comes only through a free responsiveness to life and a direct perception of the relationship of things. In fact what is needed first and foremost is an animal sensibility,[1] and Dickens had it in an extraordinary measure. By his very nature he was specially marked for the earthy. This was clear from the beginning, for in his autobiographical fragment[2] - mostly used in David Copperfield - the first basic grossness about man, his eating and drinking, figures very prominently among the hardships and trials of his 'blacking' days. Surely, 'a saveloy and a penny loaf', 'a fourpenny plate of beef', 'a plate of bread and cheese and a glass of beer', 'a small plate of alamode beef', 'Hunt's roasted corn', 'a penny cottage loaf and a pennyworth of milk', and 'another small loaf and a quarter of a pound of cheese', are not without significance. But there are more positive hints. In going to Hungerford Stairs of a morning,

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1. John Press, The Fire and the Fountain, (1955), Ch. II, pp. 28–75.
2. Forster, I, II, 23–35.

'I could not resist the stale pastry put out at half-price on trays at the confectioners' doors in Tottenham Court Road, and I often spent in that the money I should have kept for my dinner. Then I went without my dinner, or bought a roll or a slice of pudding. There were two pudding shops between which I was divided according to my finances. One was in a court close to St. Martin's Church... The pudding at that shop was made with currants and was rather a special pudding, but was dear - two penn'orth not being larger than a penn'orth of more ordinary pudding. A good shop for the latter was in the Strand... It was a stout, hale pudding, heavy and flabby, with great raisins in it, stuck in whole at great distances apart. It came up hot at about noon every day, and many and many a day did I dine off it.'

'We had half-an-hour...for tea. When I had money enough I used to go to a coffee-shop, and have half-a-pint of coffee and a slice of bread-and-butter. When I had no money I took a turn in Convent-garden market, and stared at the pine-apples...'

'I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources and the difficulties of my life. I know that if a shilling or so were given me by anyone I spent it in a dinner or a tea... I know that I have lounged about the streets insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed...' (Forster, I, II, 23-35)

Thus while there are 'grief and humiliation' over his great expectations 'of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man' day by day passing away from him, there is also visible a strong craving for the grosser supports of life. It is not the case of a serious dutiful lad suffering austerely and facing toil and want heroically; it is the case of a sensitive and ambitious boy torn by a keen sense of shame and failure and a great desire to eat and drink better. There is no attempt at contentment in this nature: even the ability to keep within means is on the side of gratification - 'I could not resist the stale pastry,' and where satisfaction is not possible, the mere yearning is indulged in - 'When I had no money I... stared at the pine-apples.'

This passion for eating and drinking was not a symptom of

poverty, to be sure; nor was there any sense of gluttony about it. It was only an aspect of his great lust for life, and hence it continued through success and ease. He would like to tempt his friends with 'a glass of Punch and a cigar',[1] and with 'a red hot chop...for dinner, and a glass of good wine' and 'a cutlet' and 'a bit of fish'.[2] And toothsome dishes would elicit special admiration from him; he tried to thank his host Augustus Egg's cook personally for the excellent meals she had prepared.[3] Again, just as each bedroom in Gad's Hill 'was fitted up with a small library' and 'had a fire in the cold weather', exactly so 'there were cups and saucers, a copper kettle, a tea-caddy, a tea-pot, sugar and milk in each.' In later days when he himself 'rarely took more than bread and cheese and a glass of ale, he seemed to enjoy watching the rest of the company tucking in':

> "The menu for the dinner would be on the sideboard, and he would discuss the items with his guests in this fashion: 'Cock-a-leekie? Good! Decidedly good. Fried soles with shrimp sauce? Good again. Croquettes of chicken? Weak. Very weak. Decided want of imagination here...' and so on."[4]

Thus eating and drinking were a matter of great interest and special liking, and all these dinners and parties were not unlike those that Shakespeare enjoyed, his last being at 'New Place' with Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton beside him. In fact Dickens's visual sense and his grosser senses of hearing, touch, smell, and taste were fully matched in their sharpness. He was like Shakespeare in this,

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1. Letters, I, 10. To Thomas Beard.
2. Ibid., I, 135, 136. To John Forster.
3. Randolph Quirk, Charles Dickens and Appropriate Language, (1959), p. 3.
4. Hesketh Pearson, Dickens, (1949), p. 298.

and also like Keats who was 'earthy, with a sweet tooth, and a relish for spices, cream, and snuff...'[1]

It is important to note this zest for food and drink in Dickens's life, because it is so prominent in his work. The whole race of 'unctuous monsters'[2] who believe in practical benevolence as a social ideal, the entire machinery of 'out-door relief'[3] for the neglected and the poor, in fact the symbol of Christmas itself, all seem to originate in the writer's very real craving for eatables and drinkables, and in his cruel trials on their account in his boyhood days.

Another aspect of this passion for the gross is that unquenchable hunger for perfect form which the artist as a lover of beauty seeks to gratify in the body of woman. This yearning for the ideal in the physical is - in some cases - hardly tempered by the restraint of fidelity which love or matrimony would like to impose,[4] and Dickens's

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1. Robert Graves, The Common Asphodel (1949), p. 19.
2. Humphry House, The Dickens World (1942), Ch. II, p. 51.
3. G.K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens (1906), Ch. XI, p. 266.
4. A reference to Iqbal's 'Houri and Poet' is perhaps relevant here.
   To the Houri's charge of indifference the Poet says:
   Can I help it if my nature love no dwelling, if my spirit
   Be as fitful as the dawn-breeze when it flutters through the tulips?
   While a mistress stands before me and her loveliness enchants me,
   Even then my thoughts are pining for a mistress yet more lovely;
   In a spark I crave a star, and in a star a sun: my journey
   Has no bourn, no place of halting: it is death to linger:
   When I lift the wine-cup brimming with the nectar of one springtime,
   A desire of unborn springtides comes awake to change my music,
   And with eyes full of unrest, with inextinguishable longing,
   I go seeking the fulfilment of what cannot know fulfilment.

   Poems from Iqbal (1955), trans. V.G. Kiernan, p. 36-7.

life confirms this view. This is not to occupy the psycho-analyst's chair and suggest that Dickens was pathologically libidinous; it is only to bring out the essential fact of an artist's nature. Maria Beadnell, Catherine Hogarth (Dickens), and Ellen Ternan, in a vital manner, and Mary and Georgina Hogarth, in no uncertain terms, entered his life, and his attitude to each one of them is marked by his steadfast adherence to the feminine form in its youthful freshness, physically as well as ideally. He could not allow John Forster to make light of his strong feeling in the matter of Maria Beadnell even twenty-five years later:

> 'I don't quite understand what you mean by my overrating the strength of the feeling... If you mean of my own feeling, and will only think what the desperate nature of my intensity is...then you are wrong, because nothing can exaggerate that.'[1]

But when the object of this feeling actually appeared before him as Mrs. Winters, the Dora Spenlow of David Copperfield was turned into the Flora Finching of Little Dorrit. Her only crime was that with time she had changed from 'a lily' into 'a peony'. Hardly different seems the cause of his separation from his wife. Twenty-two years of conjugal life, at home and abroad, and the ten children these had brought, could not withstand the contrast: Mrs. Dickens, a middle-aged matron, 'with...fat little wrists over which her bracelets would sometimes come tumbling into the soup at dinner',[2] and Ellen Ternan, a fair-haired girl of eighteen. Again, the fact that Georgina 'idolized Dickens and always took his part' as against her sister's should give a greater, though by no means sinister, meaning to her

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1. K.J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction, (1958), pp. 8-9.
2. Ibid., p. 155.

presence in the house than only as an intelligent manageress. His description - contrary to the usual expression - of his wife's pregnancy as an 'uninteresting condition'[1] urges one to consider Jack Lindsay's remark on Dickens's uneasy situation, 'contemplating Georgina's young placid curves and still sensually drawn to Kate'. Obviously this physical advantage in the unmarried younger sister's case continued in his view till he saw a yet younger and better figure, Ellen Ternan.

Mary Hogarth is a slightly complex matter. Her beauty, her youth, her sweetness, and her death would make an ideal heroine in Edgar Allan Poe, but she haunted and inspired Dickens's powerful imagination no less. She lived on in his work, Little Nell being her first appearance,[2] and she lived on in his life: the ring he slipped from her finger, he wore till his death; he wished to be buried by her side; her spirit came to him and conversed with him in exquisite visions, at home and abroad, asleep and awake. Dream and reality met in the passionate intensity with which he idealized her memory, and unconscious tears bore testimony to the truth of his devotion.[3] She was for him the embodiment of physical, moral and aesthetic excellence: 'so perfect a creature never breathed... She had not a fault'.

It sounds profane to indulge in such surmise here, but one is tempted to imagine what would have happened if Mary had not died. Most probably she would have been what her younger sister, Georgina,

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1. Jack Lindsay, Charles Dickens (1950), p. 297.
2. Letters, I, 305. To Thomas Latimer.
3. K.J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction, (1958), pp. 86-7.

in her place came to be; but if she had married and borne children, she would probably have been in her brother-in-law's eyes what his own wife had come to be. Only death intervened to elevate her into a life-long ghostly ideal.

One may also note the fact that when giving the sad news[1] to Edward Chapman, W.H. Ainsworth, George Thomson, George Cox, Thomas Beard, Richard Johns, and others, Dickens did not merely say that Mary had died, but almost invariably he wrote that she had died 'in my arms'. Consciously or unconsciously the body entered even into this most innocent attachment.

Perhaps a better idea of Dickens's nature in this regard can be had from hints of early dates. For instance, on 30 October 1837 Dickens wrote to W.H. Ainsworth about Mrs. Touchet's nineteen-year-old niece, Miss Mary Anne Harrison: 'I hope Miss Harrison is married. If I were a single man I should hate her husband mortally.'[2] Again, in 1839 he said in a letter to Forster: 'Yes - I wrote to that effect to the beautiful Mrs. F. whose eyelashes are in my memory.'[3]

And then Miss Christiana Weller's story is interesting enough. Some of Dickens's letters contain some very significant remarks. Viewing her in the light of Mary Hogarth, he wrote to T.J. Thompson on 28 February 1844: 'Good God what a mad man I should seem, If the incredible feeling I have conceived for that girl could be made plain to anyone!'[4] He addressed her father on 1 March: 'she started out

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1. Letters, I, 106-124.
2. Ibid., I, 235.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., I, 573.

alone from the whole crowd the instant I saw her, and will remain there always in my sight.'[1] His reaction to Thompson's startling disclosure of his love for her was expressed in his letter of 11 March: 'I felt the blood go from my face to don't know where, and my very lips turned white. I never in my life was so surprised, or had the whole current of my life so stopped, for the instant, as when I felt, at a glance, what your letter said.'[2] And he wrote to Miss Weller on 8 April that if he had not himself been married, he would have experienced 'the greatest happiness and pleasure' of his life to have run his friend through the body 'with good sharp Steel.'[3] His sense of choice and his intensity of desire were both suggested when he told Thompson that he had known her only 'a few days' but 'that hours of her' were 'years in the lives of common women...'[4] And this hypersensitiveness did not diminish in the least, for fourteen years later in March 1858 he spoke - to Wilkie Collins - in the same intense language about Ellen Ternan: 'I have never known a moment's peace or content since the last night of The Frozen Deep. I do suppose myself that never was a man so seized and rended by one spirit.'[5]

It may be gathered from the above that drawn in extraordinarily passionate characters as it was, Dickens's covenant with beauty was strictly limited to its term of youth and freshness, and almost always underlined by a yearning for touch. Elizabeth Barrett

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1. Letters, I, 575.
2. Ibid., I, 579-80.
3. Ibid., I, 592.
4. Ibid., I, 579-80.
5. Hesketh Pearson, Dickens, (1949), p. 251.

Browning's reaction to Dickens's separation from his wife was bound to be what it was. She wrote to Miss S. Bayley on 11 July 1858:

> 'What is this sad story about Dickens and his wife? Incompatibility of temper after twenty-three years of married life? What a plea! - Worse than irregularity of the passions, it seems to me. Thinking of my own peace and selfish pleasure, too, I would rather be beaten by my husband once a day than lose my child out of the house - yes, indeed. And the Dickens's have children younger than Penini! - Poor woman! She must suffer bitterly - that is sure.'[1]

But Mrs. Browning's conception of love was thoroughly spiritual, as indeed it had derived from her own life, from the soul's triumph over the body:

> 'If thou must love me, let it be for naught
> Except for love's sake only. Do not say
> "I love her for her smile...her look...her way
> Of speaking gently,...for a trick of thought
> That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
> A sense of pleasant ease on such a day" -
> For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
> Be changed, or change for thee, - and love so wrought,
> May be unwrought so...'[2]

Not without significance did Dickens make 'the undisciplined heart' the theme of Copperfield, and, viewed in this light, it becomes all the more autobiographical. His undisciplined heart was the most vital fact about him. Maria Beadnell could age as Mrs. Winters, and Catherine Hogarth could date as Mrs. Dickens, but perhaps he himself would not agree that he could grow old, for the fire of desire burned on fiercely in him. And rightly he knew the great secret of creative art. He had found the patience of an intending writer so exemplary and peculiar that he had to say, 'You will never make an author as

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1. Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan (1952), pp. 13-14.
2. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sonnets from the Portuguese, XIV.

you can never be one of the genus irritabile.'[1] And he himself made an author par excellence partly because he was one of 'the genus irritabile' par excellence.

Dickens must have been conscious all along of his innate lack of sustained devotion to a particular choice, and there is no reason why his complaints of domestic unhappiness should be rejected as a false after-thought. Because most probably Ellen Ternan's emergence on the scene only gave voice to what had existed in the subconscious throughout.

Not long before he met her, he had written in Dorrit about the newly-married Sparklers:

> 'So the Bride had mounted into her handsome chariot, incidentally accompanied by the Bridegroom; and after rolling smoothly over a fair pavement, had begun to jolt through a Slough of Despond, and through a long, long avenue of wrack and ruin. Other nuptial carriages are said to have gone the same road, before and since.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XV.)

Perhaps this general observation was not without a strong personal flavour, but in spite of the great restlessness of his nature he had done his best to keep the holy vows of matrimony. However, when the

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1. Letters, I, 141. To an unknown correspondent in 1837.
Coleridge in Biographia Literaria, Ch. II, asserts the injustice of applying this 'old sarcasm of Horace' upon 'the scribblers of his time' to all poets. To him the 'men of the greatest genius...appear to have been of calm and tranquil temper in all that related to themselves', and he refers to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton in this regard. But one might perhaps urge that the second generation of the romantics, unlike the first of Wordsworth and Coleridge, were in one sense or another, decidedly among the 'genus irritabile'. Dickens's nature seems to have affinities with that of Byron, Shelley, and Keats who were men of the greatest genius and no scribblers. Perhaps active irritability was a general mark of the early nineteenth century as decadent discontent of the late. Nevertheless, one finds a certain measure of equanimity entering into Dickens's work with Bleak House, and there is a visible mood of *resignation* in Little Dorrit.

trial came rather late in the day and in the shapely garb of freshness and youth and beauty, he was helplessly shaken. But he did not give in, if at all he did, without a struggle, and his latest biographers suggest that it was both hard and long.

A number of babies as the sign of a happy home and an abundant sympathy for the sinners in flesh - though this primarily reflected a topical interest - were in consonance with Dickens's generally 'gross' view of the man-woman relationship. This may also account for George Santayana's criticism that in Dickens there is no great love drama, not even that of the traditional sort.[1] It is largely true that he did not depict the yearning of the spirit. Sydney Carton is a glorious exception, but he too figures as a recovery from dissipation and partly illustrates the defeat of ideal love in terms of physical reality. Hence taking into consideration the two basic facts of human activity, namely, eating and drinking and sex, one finds that Dickens's opaque preferences in real life directly bear upon his social philosophy of benevolence and forgiveness. It is interesting that these virtues also share in the Christian behaviour, and this is very important for Dickens's art. Because in the absence of a theme like soul-inspiring love, he comes to have the theme of heart-ennobling fellow-feeling. This meant a double gain. His very special grossness was balanced by a collective idealism which could even assume the holy. And happily this was the need of the hour too: the ever-growing industrialism, lashed at by the fury of steam locomotion, had flung the 'Condition of England' question in the face of

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1. George Santayana, 'Dickens', The Dial (New York), November 1921.

the age. Dickens's answer was - human well-being and good cheer, the two social components of sensuous health. Oliver said, 'Please, Sir, I want some more;' Sleary said, 'People must be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow.' And they echoed not only the mute cry of the 'insufficiently and unsatisfactorily' -fed boy he had himself been but also the open challenge of the suffering masses in the New Poor Law-and-Chartism times. The solution was typical of the times in that it was fundamentally materialistic, but it was sincerely surmounted with the Christian ethics of benevolence and humanity. Victorian England could continue to prosper on earth with a fair prospect of Heaven. Dickens thought that there were 'more roads to Heaven' than any sect believed, but that there could be none which had not the 'flowers' of 'gentleness and mercy' 'garnishing the way'.[1] He therefore chose the one that passed through human want and failing, and moved on garnishing the way with these same flowers. Obviously in this material mould Heaven was not a saint's prize; it was only a sinner's need.

Thus Dickens's boundless compassion for the poor, the neglected and the fallen arose, in the main, from the dangers and temptations of his own life and the gross demands of his own nature.

This study now returns to the point where the short probe into biography began. Knowing that it was the very condition of Dickens's being to be attracted by the earthy, it can be said that this condition was fulfilled adequately: he ate and drank with healthy relish, and he longed, perhaps even managed, to live more than a full normal sex

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1. Letters, I, 313. To Revd. T. Robinson.

life. And it was from his abnormal animal sensibility that the real impulse to his art came. For it may be held that his descriptive quality derives from his craving for the palpable, his humour from the soulfulness that follows the gratification of this craving, and his satire from the bitterness that results from the delaying or denial of that same gratification. Again, solidity and form being always his first imaginative choice, it is description which his imagery specially animates. The word 'description' is used here as Aristotle uses the word 'Spectacle' in Poetics in the context of Tragedy, but obviously in the context of the novel it bears a wider implication. It means not only 'stage-appearance of the actors' but also 'scenery', and covers the non-conversational and non-narrative parts which constitute background, atmosphere, setting, scene, and portraiture. In fact it represents all that is static about men and things.

Dickens claimed to be a 'sharp-sighted individual',[1] and he was also conscious of his power to fancy and perceive similarities in dissimilars. Gifted as he was with the 'Seeing Eye', to use a Carlylean expression though not in any transcendental sense, there came his way wonderful opportunities to scan the vast and varied pageant of life, metropolitan as well as provincial, Continental as well as American. As a little labourer in the blacking warehouse, as a clerk in the solicitor's office, as a reporter in the Houses of Parliament and on the country roads, as a journalist and as a writer, as an actor for love and as a 'public reader' for money, as a practical

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1. Letters, I, 415. To W.C. Macready.

humanitarian and as a keen sightseer, as a tireless rambler and as a zealous tourist, in all capacities Dickens used his eye as indeed few great writers ever did, and what is more, he used it not from a detached lonely tower but from the centre of the stage. It could not be otherwise: with the life and soul of fifty human beings in him, he must always have the full fun of the fair. So what he saw he felt also. One might say he felt with his eye or he saw with his heart.

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How the artist in Dickens brought to bear all his sensuous insight upon the static in men and things will be seen later; first comes the rather technical question of the position of description in the novel.

Aristotle admits that the 'Spectacle' or 'stage-appearance of the actors' is an attraction, but observes that it is less artistic to arouse the tragic pity and fear by it, because it requires 'extraneous aid' and its 'getting-up is more a matter for the costumier than the poet'. He does mention 'scenery', but he does not seem to give as much attention to it as to 'Spectacle'; most probably he had similar thoughts about it. In fact he believed that the tragic effect should be produced 'by the very structure and incidents of the play - which is the better way and shows the better poet'.

Critics, in general, like to apply these remarks to description in the novel. Robert Liddell, for instance, holds the view that

'it is more creditable to cause pity and terror by the happenings in a story rather than by the atmosphere'.[1] These law-givers, ancient and modern, are right enough in their own way. For if the aim be only to catch character in <u>action</u> in the interests of fear and pity, the main stress must necessarily fall on the 'incidents' or 'happenings' in the lives of men, because it is their 'then - and then - and then' movement in time that best arrests attention. But perhaps the whole artistic truth does not lie there. An incident or happening is not only time-bound, it is also space-girt, and its full sensuous representation is sure to intensify the tragic effect of pity and terror. And one can carry the argument into the house of criticism itself. The very same scientific attitude with which Plato and Aristotle tried to promote the cult of the mind at the expense of the ancient Greek cult of the body, has lately come to the conclusion that there is nothing like space and time as apart from each other, that they only co-exist, because they are one and the same thing, 'space-time'.

One wonders if Aristotle himself would have transferred his criticism from the drama to the novel. Perhaps he would not. Yet it appears that his primary interest lay in Tragedy, and most probably he would have expected the poet to employ his talent for metaphor, i.e., his <u>visual</u> power above all, to depict 'incidents' dramatically rather than paint scenes, portray characters, or create atmosphere. Humphry House notes the omission of lyric poetry in his treatment, and refers to some beautiful descriptions it contains. These clearly

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1. Robert Liddell, <u>A Treatise on the Novel</u> (1947), Ch. VI, p. 116.

show that the Greeks were sensitive to visual beauty and that 'even landscape was a theme of the highest poetry, though not landscape for its own sake':

> 'These are the effects of a kind which Shakespeare, too, achieved over and over again, within a drama, relating visual description closely to dramatic action and the main themes of the play.'[1]

That is coming nearer to the point, because the drama is closer to the novel than lyric poetry, and perhaps yet closer is narrative poetry. But even there description is regarded as subsidiary to the main theme and total effect. A. Clutton-Brock says:

> 'A story well told gives cumulative power to a poem, and every detail of the story is charged with the significance of the whole. But description, unless very concise and vivid and relevant, lessens this cumulative power...
>
> 'We ought to ask whether it adds to the cumulative power of the whole. If not, the description, however beautiful in itself, is irrelevant; and any part of it, however vivid, which does not add to the cumulative power of the whole, is also irrelevant. In fact all description should be judged in its relation to the poem which contains it, and not by its own particular beauty or ugliness. The object of the poem is to express and communicate a certain emotion. Does the description help or impede that object?'[2]

Again, he disapproves of too much visual representation:

> 'But if a description in a narrative poem is extremely pictorial, it will impose on that poem the limitations as well as the qualities of a picture. It will represent a fixed moment of time with little relation to the past or the future, and so will interrupt the narrative.'

This static element introduced by the eye is equally unwelcome to the critic of fiction. Robert Liddell says:

> 'It is sometimes alleged that fiction, since it does not dispose of the visual effects of drama, ought in some way to

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1. Humphry House, Aristotle's Poetics, (1956), pp. 41-2. by Members of the English
2. A. Clutton-Brock, 'Description in Poetry', Essays and Studies, Association, (1911) Vol. II, coll. H.C. Beeching.

> supply their place by description. To this argument the best reply is that in the best days of drama there was a good deal of austerity about visual effects...'[1]

One is tempted to quote again Humphry House's reference to Shakespeare's descriptions and show that there is some conflict among the critics, but probably that derives from the writers themselves. Perhaps a few instances are necessary.

While Jane Austen does not like descriptions to be 'more minute than will be liked' and does not approve of 'too many particularities of right hand and left',[2] George Eliot is prepared to explain the details of Florentine life and history in Romola and those of English Village life in Silas Marner or The Mill on the Floss in terms of 'psychological causes':

> 'It is the habit of my imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself.'[3]

Nor is Charlotte Bronte's prefatorial view of her sister's descriptions without interest. She writes of the setting of Wuthering Heights:

> 'As far as the scenery and locality are concerned, it could scarcely have been so sympathetic: Ellis Bell did not describe as one whose eye and taste alone found pleasure in the prospect; her native hills were far more to her than a spectacle; they were what she lived in, and by, as much as the wild birds, their tenants, or as the heather, their produce. Her descriptions, then, of natural scenery, are what they should be, and all they should be.'[4]

And Jane Austen would have been shocked to see R.L. Stevenson

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1. Robert Liddell, A Treatise on the Novel, (1947), Ch. VI, p. 112.
2. Jane Austen's Letters, (1952), ed. R.W. Chapman, p. 100.
3. The George Eliot Letters, (1956), ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol. IV, p. 97.
4. Charlotte Brontë, Preface to the 1850 edition of Wuthering Heights.

converting a writer's study into a scientist's laboratory, for he thinks a map and an almanack are essential to his vocation:

> 'The author must know his countryside, whether real or imaginary, like his hand; the distances, the points of the compass, the place of the sun's rising, the behaviour of the moon, should all be beyond cavil... The tale has a root there; it grows in that soil; it has a spine of its own behind the words.'[1]

Anton Chekhov believes 'descriptions of nature should be very brief and have an incidental character...one has to snatch at small details, grouping them in such a manner that after reading them one can obtain the picture on closing one's eyes.'[2]

On the one side there is Jane Austen who disapproves of too minute descriptions with a regard for the reader, or the critic, for that is what 'than will be liked' implies, and on the other there is Charlotte Bronte who finds the descriptions in Wuthering Heights 'what they should be, all they should be', because the life of the authoress merges in the 'life' of the native hills - she is as 'their tenants', as ' their produce'. Between these extreme attitudes - typically classical and romantic one might say - there is the position admitting of a close link between 'character' and 'medium', and this is perhaps best defined by Edmond and Jules De Goncourt:

> 'The material description of things and places is not, in the novel, so we understand it, description for description's sake. It is the means of transporting the reader into a certain setting favourable to the moral emotion which should spring from these things and places.'[3]

The whole issue finally depends upon what the writer makes of

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1. Robert Louis Stevenson, 'My First Book', The Art of Writing, (1910), pp. 135-6.
2. Anton Chekhov, Life and Letters (1925). Letter to his brother (10 May 1886).
3. Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, Journal, 8 aout, 1865. Quot. Robert Liddell in Some Principles of Fiction, (1953), pp. 94 and 118.

man and nature, and how he relates one to the other. In fact it is his eye that is directly involved here: Does the physical appeal to it, and does it connect the physical in man with the physical that is nature, and, again, does it connect the physical without with the spiritual within?

In Bunyan's answer to these questions dream came to possess reality. The outward was indissolubly linked to the inward, but only to be its illustration so that to get at the truth, the soul must break through phenomena. Description was thus bound to come in but only allegorically. Defoe's was the resourceful tradesman's reaction making external things serviceable. His islands, sea-beaches, trees, rocks, and caves, all bring out this objective quality of his vision, and it is primarily through his masterly realistic detail that he achieves verisimilitude. Richardson is capable of depicting the gross in man, subtly and dramatically, but he does not seem to respond to the gross in nature, let alone relate the two.

Fielding is both artist and critic in this matter of description, as almost in every other. Pointing back to the example of the ancients, he looks ahead by adapting it to his own medium. He declares that it is 'truth' that distinguishes his writings from idle romances on the one hand and dry history on the other:

> 'That our work, therefore, might be in no danger of being likened to the labours of these historians, we have taken every occasion of interspersing through the whole sundry similes, descriptions, and other kind of poetical embellishments. These are, indeed, designed...to refresh the mind, whenever those slumbers, which in a long work are apt to invade the reader as well as the writer, shall begin to creep upon him. Without interruptions of this kind, the best narrative of plain matter of fact must overpower every reader; for nothing but the

> everlasting watchfulness, which Homer has ascribed only to Jove himself, can be proof against a newspaper of many volumes.
>
> 'We shall leave to the reader to determine with what judgment we have chosen the several occasions for inserting those ornamental parts of our work...'[1]

Pleading 'many precedents' for this method he prepares 'the mind of the reader' for the reception of the heroine 'by filling it with every pleasing imag e' he can draw 'from the face of nature'. Thus Chapter II in Book IV of Tom Jones constitutes a perfect idyllic setting for the divine beauty Sophia's appearance, and then her physical and mental excellence is described in lovely detail. An earlier, rather 'Gothic', description of Mr. Allworthy's house, in Chapter IV of Book I is also worth attention, but this one here, showing person and place in harmony, appears to be important. Fielding is healthfully but warily introducing his sense of the gross into the art of the novel and in the name of the classical tradition.

Smollett's Travels through France and Italy is largely narrative although it could have assimilated any amount of natural scenery. But it may be held that the epistolary form of Humphry Clinker was only a device to let in the descriptive element for padding up a thin story; otherwise there is nothing in it to justify adoption of the Richardsonian form. Again, the graphic accounts of Bath, London, and the other places the Brambles visit in England and Scotland, have no real connexion with the action which is itself so slender.

Mrs. Radcliffe strove to evoke atmosphere from the quaint dark ruins of medieval romance, but generally the result is far from convincing, the terror not being so very terrible, somehow. The

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1. Tom Jones, Bk. IV, Ch. I.

reason seems to be that in her there is no genuine communion between the 'ghost' of nature and the 'ghost' of man, and this in turn is due to the fact that the psychological does not really derive from the physical. Thus her descriptions are mostly half-alive verbal heaps.

Jane Austen had sufficient reason to parody Mrs. Radcliffe's work, not because she had a better or greater sense of the physical than her target, but because she knew her province and kept strictly within it. Whatever sensibility she had was neatly tempered with sense, so that there could be nothing animal about it. From the paucity of description in her work one would judge that she hardly found any bond between man and nature. Probably she would have thought Wordsworth queer if he had warned her instead of Dorothy:

> 'Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
> In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
> Touch - for there is a spirit in the woods.'[1]

Her descriptions, few and slight as they are, like the landscape view from the garden of Donwell Abbey in Emma or that of Lyme and its surroundings in Persuasion, are there only because she could not do without them. This proves the obvious. The human drama cannot be had in a vacuum; it must grow from the physical. But in her case it does not grow from the physical; it is only casually propped on it. Sir Herbert Read rightly thinks that there is no 'mood of compulsion' behind her descriptive prose.[2]

Scott however is rich in romantic description, and loves to create wild and rugged, or haunting and weird effects. His interest

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1. 'Nutting', ll. 54-6.
2. Herbert Read, English Prose Style, (1952), p. 109.

in the physical is distinctive. John Ruskin says:

> 'And...observe Scott's habit of looking at nature neither as dead, or merely material...nor as altered by his own feelings ...but as having an animation and pathos of its own, wholly irrespective of human presence or passion, - an animation which Scott loves and sympathizes with, as he would with a fellow-creature, forgetting himself altogether, and subduing his own humanity before what seems to him the power of landscape.'[1]

This appraisal is immediately connected with Scott's poetry, but obviously it is equally true of his treatment of nature in his novels. A sense of fellowship with nature hinted at above is reflected in setting and atmosphere almost everywhere, the description of Tully-Veolan in Waverley, of Muscat Cairn in The Heart of Midlothian, and of the Solway Firth in Redgauntlet being among the most notable examples. Perhaps the 'geographical intensity' with which, according to E.W.M. Tillyard,[2] Scott realizes his scenic effects derives directly from his attitude to nature. He transmutes the past into a living reality as much by continually reviewing the men of the bygone days against the palpable background of nature as by resuscitating their long-forgotten manners and speech.

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This passing look at the theories and practice of description in some great novelists serves to show that by the time Dickens appeared on the scene it had fairly established itself in the art: it had risen from a merely subsidiary position to a respectable

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1. John Ruskin, Modern Painters, (1856), Vol. III, Ch. XVI, § 36.
2. E.W.M. Tillyard, The Epic Strain in the English Novel, (1958), p. 138.

complementary station. However, in his hands it came to acquire a rare distinction, and one wonders if any writer before or since found and left it as he did. He devoted his sustained and concentrated attention to it throughout, and that is why it assumes extraordinary importance in the appreciation of his art. As suggested earlier, it is in description that his abnormal animal sensibility and his rare sense of comparison joined to grow into a symbolism. It is now to be seen how this was actually achieved.

Dickens opened his literary career with 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', printed in the Monthly Magazine in December 1833 and later republished under the title 'Mr. Minns and his Cousin', and there followed 'Scenes', 'Characters', 'Tales', etc., in the same line, all to constitute Sketches by Boz. This work was a blend of description and narration; and the balance between the two clearly shows the writer's creative reaction to the static in man and nature as well as his dramatic version of the movement they involve. His vocation of a reporter of 'news' was supported by his eye for form: not only was the incident reproduced, the persons and places were there, too. It was not journalism simply; it was descriptive journalism - something exceptional at the time.

With a start thus made description continued to be prominent in Dickens's work until, a decade later, it received a big incentive from his tour of America, and, a few years afterwards, from his sojourn in Italy. Then there went on throughout, as an undercurrent, his active association with Household Words and All the Year Round. Thus in his novels, travel-books, and articles, description came to be his special concern. It is perhaps necessary to know whether he achieved his

descriptive effects consciously, and whether he himself had anything to say on the place of description in the novel.

It appears that Dickens set out on the descriptive way in the natural order of things, and perhaps he had a vague sense of his special talent in this direction. But probably the matter was also brought to the fore at an early stage by the need for illustrations in the various monthly serials. The emblematic character and the symbolic significance of the various cover-designs and frontispieces of his novels have been closely observed and minutely explained by the critics, but the descriptive aspect of the corresponding parts of writing does not seem to have been viewed in this context. It is clear from Dickens's letters to his illustrators that he loved to see his work well illustrated, and one also gathers the impression that Dickens was to a certain extent mindful of the need to give exceptional visual distinction to some scene, setting, or character.

Probabilities soon give place to certainties, for Dickens is heard discussing the descriptions of the Black Country in The Old Curiosity Shop. He wrote to John Forster on 4 October 1840:

> 'You will recognise a description of the road we travelled between Birmingham and Wolverhampton but I had conceived it so well in my mind that the execution doesn't please me quite as well as I expected. I shall be curious to know whether you think there's anything in the notion of the man and his furnace-fire. It would have been a good thing, to have opened a new story with. I have been thinking since...[1]

This shows a definite striving after descriptive effect based on real perception and a clear consciousness of execution falling short of conception. It also refers to a fact which in a way

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1. Letters, I, 274.

connects his life with his work. He was in the habit of recording his impressions of the people he met and the places he visited. During his tour of Scotland in the summer of 1841 he kept sending home an account of his activities which contained the beautiful descriptions of the hillscape and valley of Glencoe. Similarly he wrote from abroad copious letters to John Forster and some other friends describing scenes and men and things. These were designed to serve as hints and reference matter for his travel books, American Notes and Pictures from Italy. Thus it can be said that when he was not working on a novel or a story, he was in a sense more occupied with description, and keeping in view its large share in the Christmas tales and stories and in the novels themselves, it can be urged that he handled it as a major problem of his art.

To indicate Dickens's consistent interest in description in general some references must be made to his letters. On 2 December 1841 Dickens wrote Mrs. S.C. Hall about George Catlin, the American ethnologist and portrait-painter:

> 'I am greatly taken with him, and in his descriptions... I shake hands with him on every page.'[1]

On 31 January 1842 he wrote to Thomas Mitton from America:

> 'There is a great deal afloat here in the way of subjects for description. I keep my eyes open pretty wide, and hope to have done so to some purpose by the time I come home.'[2]

What he expects a sight to do to the beholder may be seen from a letter written again from America to John Forster on 15 April 1842. He is speaking about a prairie:

> 'You are on a great plain, which is like a sea without

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1. Letters, I, 365.
2. Ibid., I, 381.

> water. I am exceedingly fond of wild and lonely scenery, and believe that I have the faculty of being as much impressed by it as any man living...the prospect looked like that ruddy sketch of Catlin's, which attracted our attention... But to say that the sight is a landmark in one's existence, and awakens a new set of sensations, is sheer gammon...'[1]

He wrote to Forster on 1 November 1843, now about his tour of the Continent:

> 'If I had made money, I should unquestionably fade away from the public eye for a year, and enlarge my stock of description and observation by seeing countries new to me... I shall write my descriptions to you from time to time, exactly as I did in America; and you will be able to judge whether or not, a new and attractive book may not be made on such ground...'[2]

Appreciating Prescott's book he wrote to C.C. Felton on 2 January 1844:

> 'I think his descriptions masterly, his style brilliant, his purpose manly and gallant always.'[3]

Yet again, he wrote to Forster from Italy in November 1844:

> 'And diving down from that into its wickedness and gloom - its awful prisons, deep below the water; its judgment chambers, secret doors, deadly nooks...and coming out again into the radiant unsubstantial Magic of the town; and diving in again, into vast churches, and old tombs - a new sensation, a new memory, a new mind came upon me. Venice is a bit of my brain from this time.'[4]

Such intense emotional reaction to the physical, whether of nature's creating, or of man's making, recalls Keats. It can be reasonably argued that Dickens tried to communicate through his descriptions what he himself looked for in things. And that is primarily couched in terms of sheer sensuousness - 'a new set of sensations', 'a new memory', 'a new mind'.

This profound receptiveness reveals another quality of Dickens's

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1. Letters, I, 431.
2. Ibid., I, 544.
3. Ibid., I, 554.
4. Ibid., I, 637.

imagination: a mysterious power of relating the 'ghostly' in man to the 'ghostly' in nature. His extraordinary passion for the gross is thus counterpoised by his extreme susceptibility to the fine. The haunting atmosphere of visions and shadowy forms, good as well as evil, and the tender, healing touch of pity, innocence, and forgiveness draw their sustenance from this Shelleyan ethereality thus uniquely emanating from Keatsian solidity. Also rooted here are his great sense of wonder, his lasting love of the Arabian Nights type of romance, his earnestness about dreams,[1] his belief in animal magnetism,[2] and his practice of mesmeric and hypnotic methods[3] and conjuring tricks.[4] One might say he had a genuine enthusiasm for the occult, and as Shakespeare introduced it into the fabric of The Tempest, so was he trying to do in his last, The Mystery of Edwin Drood.

Most probably it is again this susceptibility to ghostly effects that accounts for Dickens's fascination with the character of Madge Wildfire in Scott's Heart of Midlothian, with its 'doubtful, uncertain, twilight sort of rationality'.[5] She seems to be the archetype of all Dickens's half-witted creation, hovering between the conscious and the sub-conscious. Perhaps Barnaby Rudge, Mr. Chuffy, Mr. Dick, Miss Flite, Mrs. Flintwinch, and Maggy and their many variations, all in a row point to that touch of primordial disorder in the human consciousness which Dickens found so captivatingly revealed in Madge

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1. G.H. Lewes, 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism', in Fortnightly Review, February 1872.
2. The Mudfog Papers (1880), p. 85, and Edwin Drood, Ch. III.
3. Letters, I, p. 376.
4. Ibid., I, pp. 497 and 506.
5. The Heart of Midlothian, Ch. XXX.

Wildfire. G.H. Lewes appears to have referred to this very occult trait of Dickens's mind when he said:

> 'I have never observed any trace of the insane temperament in Dickens's works, or life, they being indeed singularly free even from the eccentricities which often accompany exceptional powers; nevertheless, with all due limitations, it is true that there is considerable light shed upon his works by the action of the imagination in hallucination. To him also revived images have the vividness of sensations; to him also created images have the coercive force of realities, excluding all control, all contradiction. What seems preposterous, impossible to us, seemed to him simple fact of observation.'[1]

In spite of Forster's refutation of 'the hallucinative theory' of Dickens's imagination, one can say that Dickens himself knew the highly fanciful quality of his vision. Some such consciousness lurked in his prefatorial remarks, which he originally made in 1839, but which he liked to repeat in the 1848 edition of Nicholas Nickleby:

> 'It is remarkable that what we call the world, which is so very credulous in what professes to be true, is most incredulous in what professes to be imaginary; and that, while, every day in real life, it will allow in one man no blemishes, and in another no virtues, it will seldom admit a very strongly-marked character, either good or bad, in a fictitious narrative, to be within the limits of probability.'

This complaint of a general imaginative deficiency is largely elicited by a lack of proper response to his characterization. But by 1853 he could speak in wider terms which seem to descend from the critical climate of Lyrical Ballads. Defending the possibility of Spontaneous Combustion against G.H. Lewes's attack, and hence his use of it, he concluded his preface to Bleak House with the words:

> 'In Bleak House, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things.'

This remark about the novel under discussion may well cover most of his work, for what it singles out is only a particular illustration

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1. See fn. 1, p. 36.

of his general attitude to reality. Writing to Forster later, he develo~ped the same point in a forceful, representative tone:

> 'It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to me that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like - to make the thing in short a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way - I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess), that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment.'[1]

Again, Lewes's inference that compared with that of Fielding or Thackeray, Dickens's was 'merely an <u>animal</u> intelligence, i.e., restricted to perceptions',[2] is fallacious. For thought is there in his work, only its roots go deep into the realm of sensation. And it is well that it is so, because it has the freshness and vigour of life - it is no intellectual's half-dead, posed reaction to phenomena which are stages removed from diffident experience. That is, of course, the reason why Fielding and Thackeray are so deficient in that intensity of presentation which is Dickens's chief glory. And this difference is most visible in their sense of comparison. Fielding's similes, and Thackeray's after his, are almost always classical, and hence ornamental, while Dickens's metaphorical wealth derives from direct individual responsiveness to life. This is also the reason why he can so well interpret the social spirit in a human context. It is as erroneous to suppose that his was 'merely an <u>animal</u> intelligence' as to believe that Keats had no thought. Dickens was extraordinary among great writers in that he had a very

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1. Forster, IX, I, 727-8. Also see Appendix A, p. 430.
2. See fn. 1, p. 36.

correct idea of his own powers as well as of his readers'. He obviously knew that there was many a dull heart which did not see the mind in him. He wrote to Forster as early as 1843:

> 'I could sustain my place in the minds of thinking men... But how many readers do not think!'[1]

Indeed it is not given to everybody to think in terms of the senses. Only a Khayyam can know the philosophy of 'a Loaf of Bread' and 'a Flask of Wine', only a Shakespeare can find tongues in trees, 'books in the running brooks' and 'Sermons in stones', and only a Wordsworth can get from the 'meanest flower that blows' 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'. Dickens is with these rather than with Fielding or Thackeray. An abnormal animal sensibility, giving his genius an inexhaustible creative momentum, is there all the time, but what it bestows on him as an artist is not an animal intelligence but a live, vehemently-felt insight. For the relations he fancies or perceives in things spring from the very dregs of life, and are as much true of the collective as of the individual. And it is primarily in this sense that he is a poet and his work more European than English, or better still, more universal than European.

Thus Dickens's strong passion for the gross was balanced by his acute sense of the fine, the result being a vision which could be as 'ghostly' as animal and could as well ensure a power of transport as an intensity of perception. But as suggested earlier, what immediately concerns this study is the sensuous side of the poet in Dickens, namely, his treatment of the static in men and things as illustrated in description.

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1. Letters, I, 545.

It is perhaps clear that Dickens gave his very conscious and special attention to description, but it is yet to be seen what place he assigned to it within the framework of a novel. If only practice were in question, one might at once conclude that he regarded description as very important, because its profuseness in his work is obvious. But in view of the earlier references to some novelists in connexion with theory, it is perhaps better to know what, if anything, he had to say in that sense.

Aesthetically the unity and coherence of a novel poses the same problem as does that of a play, or even of a narrative poem, and critics[1] are inclined to believe that the 'unities' prescribed by the ancients were only a means for ensuring dramatic effect, the modern unity of impression being only another version of these. It can be safely asserted that from the very beginning Dickens was conscious of this artistic requirement, and that he always strove to meet it. As one of 'the genus irritabile' he lived what he wrote, as a public entertainer he had to move his readers, and as a journalist he had to influence public opinion. These conditions should naturally provide for effect and impression, but the important fact remains that he primarily achieved them not as a rhetorician but as an artist. Even the limitations of serial publication, monthly as well as weekly, were overcome in the interests of an over-all structural compactness and a unity of effect, and this happened early. For on 13 March 1841 Dickens wrote to Thomas Latimer about the Curiosity Shop:

'It is curious...that I never had the design and purpose of

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1. e.g. F. Sarcey in A Theory of the Theatre and Allardyce Nicoll in The Theory of Drama, (1931), pp. 56-7.

> a story so distinctly marked in my mind, from its commencement. All its quietness arose out of a deliberate purpose; the notion being to stamp upon it from the first, the shadow of that early death...'[1]

Thus his deep sense of loss in respect of Mary Hogarth came to serve an artistic purpose. Later, when in Martin Chuzzlewit he returned from the weekly to the monthly number, he had to be stern with himself. In the weekly part he felt cramped, for he 'hadn't room to turn', and in the monthly he seemed to have more of it than art would allow to his genius. He said in the 1844 preface:

> 'I have endeavoured in the progress of this Tale, to resist the temptation of the current Monthly Number, and to keep a steadier eye upon the general purpose and design. With this object in view, I have put a strong constraint upon myself from time to time, in many places; and I hope the story is the better for it, now.'

With Dombey and Son he came to closer grips with the problem. He prepared 'an outline' of his 'immediate intentions' and planned each instalment on paper before he sat down to write. As Forster says, in Copperfield the 'unity of drift or purpose is apparent always', but obviously it was not there without conscious effort in the form of general memoranda and number plans. Such preparation was largely to characterize his literary work over the next twenty years. John Butt sums up the position from this point of view:

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1. Letters, I, 305. Forster however seems to think differently: 'And thus was taking gradual form, with less direct consciousness on his own part than I can remember in any other instances throughout his career, a story which was to add largely to his popularity, more than any other of his works to make the bond between himself and his readers one of personal attachment, and very widely to increase the sense entertained of his powers as a pathetic as well as humorous writer.' Forster, II, VII, 146.
Writing in 1872, Forster could perhaps be right so far as what followed the Curiosity Shop was concerned, but obviously his opinion cannot be accepted as against Dickens's own in regard to this particular novel and what preceded it.

> 'These were the kind of notes which experience showed that his system of publication and his manner of work required of him. They do not determine the pattern of the novel, they do not define the path of the story, but they ensure that, the pattern once determined, the threads do not go awry, and, the path once set, there is no serious deviation in a course of as much as nineteen months. Furthermore, they have an abiding interest in that they shed light on the design in the pattern and serve to show the measure of control which Dickens exercised.'[1]

The exceptionally complex design of Our Mutual Friend was rendered more difficult owing to the serial mode of publication. Dickens referred to it in the 'POSTSCRIPT':

> 'it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them complete, perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom.'

Thus in spite of his peculiar but inevitable difficulties as a serialist, Dickens was throughout mindful of artistic standards, and in view of the last few paragraphs, one might urge that his concern for 'the general purpose and design', and his anxiety for 'story' and 'pattern' only reveal his idea of the unity and coherence in a novel. His defence of the inserted 'History of a Self-Tormentor' in Dorrit illustrates this point further. He wrote to Forster in 1856:

> 'In Miss Wade I had an idea, which I thought a new one, of making the introduced story so fit into surroundings impossible of separation from the main story, as to make the blood of the book circulate through both.'[2]

His attempt here is different from Fielding's with the History of Leonora in Joseph Andrews, or with the story of the 'Man of the Hill' in Tom Jones, or even from his own with the tales in Pickwick. He looks upon the novel as an organic whole with the same sap of life

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1. Butt and Tillotson, pp. 33-4.
2. Letters, II, 776.

running through all its parts. But besides the part-to-part or part-to-whole harmony, there is also the suggestion of 'surroundings impossible of separation from the main story'. This is very important, and, happily, Dickens has more to say on this point. He wrote to Miss Emily Jolly in May 1857, criticizing her work:

> 'The people do not talk as such people would; and the little subtle touches of description which, by making the country house and the general scene real, would give an air of reality to the people (much to be desired) - are altogether wanting... The more you set yourself to the illustration of your heroine's passionate nature, the more indispensable this attendant atmosphere of truth becomes. It would...oblige the reader to believe in her. Whereas for ever exploding like a great firework without any background, she glares and wheels and hisses, and goes out, and has lighted nothing.'[1]

Thus character is to be revealed in an 'attendant atmosphere of truth' which, in turn, is to be evoked through 'little subtle touches of description'. In other words, human behaviour and action are to be viewed against a significant physical background. Furthermore, it is not only a matter of how the physical without reflects the spiritual within, it is also a matter of how the spiritual within affects the physical without. Perhaps that is what Dickens implies when he wants the 'firework' to light something.

On the side of theory then Dickens recognizes description, not for its own sake but for the sake of probability and reality, and effect and impression; and it enjoys this position as an integral part of a whole pattern which 'the story-weaver at his loom' controls by a 'general purpose and design'. And it was in putting this view of description into practice that Dickens's passion for the gross came into full play and gradually gave rise to a symbolism.

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1. Letters, II, 850.

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Strictly speaking, description involves a sensuous rendering of the physical, and, as such, it largely concerns both nature and man in their static aspect, because the moment movement disturbs this aspect, action and incident come in, and description gives place to narration. Hence it is generally what the eye sees that forms a fit subject for description, for the aim is to arrest the physical at a single glance. But that does not mean that it aims at a photographic effect to which only the visual sense responds. Again, Dickens's own idea of exactness in description is radically different from that of the protagonists of realism like G.H. Lewes: a representation of the static no doubt, but not 'literal and catalogue-like'. In fact the static is to look as <u>living</u> in the captured instant as it is in sensuous reality. Thus it is the seeing eye nourished by animal sensibility that is in demand here, and as suggested earlier, this is exactly what Dickens has to offer. His inexhaustible fund of imagery flows from his full-blooded participation in life in all its richness and variety, and therefore his rare sense of comparison can continually draw on this vivid wealth for such design and pattern as best reveal imaginative truth.

It seems necessary to attend a little to Dickens's mastery of metaphor and to try to see how he employs imagery to relate different levels of experience. The key-note in this regard is struck by his 'infirmity to fancy or perceive relation in things which are not apparent generally'. It may be broadly suggested that where he 'fancies' such relations he works for lighter ends, and where he

'perceives' them he aims at darker effects. It may also be urged in general that his humour and ethereality are covered by 'fancifulness' and his symbolism and solidity by 'perception'.

To see how Dickens's sense of comparison, gradually and increasingly, came to merge in his talent for description, a closer view of his imagery is required. This should not however involve any exhaustive or comprehensive treatment of it, but only a little probe into its salient characteristics.

Here are a few similes and metaphors selected casually from the Sketches:

> 'He is just one of the careless, good-for-nothing, happy fellows, who float, cork-like, on the surface, for the world to play at hockey with: knocked here, and there, and everywhere: now to the right, then to the left, again up in the air, and anon to the bottom, but always reappearing and bounding with the stream buoyantly and merrily along.'
>
> 'I used to sit, think, think, thinking, till I felt as lonesome as a kitten in a wash-house copper with the lid on.'
>
> 'and back she came again, tripping over the coal-cellar lids like a whipping-top.'
>
> 'Mrs. Tibbs with a very red face, for she had been superintending the cooking operations below stairs, and looked like a wax doll on a sunny day.'
>
> 'Horatio's countenance brightened up like an old hat in a shower of rain.'
>
> 'flaunting nursery-maids, and town-made children, with parenthetical legs.'
>
> 'darting from side to side, and from end to end, like a fly in an inverted glass.'
>
> 'The boarders were seated, a lady and a gentleman alternately, like the layers of bread and meat in a plate of sandwiches.'
>
> 'those young women who almost invariably...recal to one's mind the idea of a cold fillet of veal.'

These comparisons are largely based on pure observation, and there is nearly no feeling involved. Their charm lies in their novelty and in the pleasure of discovery they give. The relations between the levels of reference here may be said to have been 'fancied'; in the following instances, however, they appear to have been 'perceived', because a deal of poetic concentration is visible:

> 'and finally retired in oyster-like bashfulness.'
>
> 'an animated sandwich, composed of a boy between two boards.'
>
> 'the damp hangs upon the house-tops and lamp-posts, and clings to you like an invisible cloak.'

In Pickwick Dickens exploits a locution two instances of which he cut out from the Sketches in a later revision.[1] The Wellers, Tony and Sam, are partial to such a style of speech:

> 'Out with it, as the father said to the child, ven he swallowed a farden.'
>
> 'That's what I call a self-evident proposition, as the dog's-meat man said, when the house-maid told him he warn't a gentleman.'
>
> 'Business first, pleasure arterwards, as King Richard the Third said ven he stabbed the t'other king in the Tower, afore he smothered the babbies.'
>
> 'How are you, Ma'am?... Wery glad to see you, indeed; and hope our acquaintance may be a long 'un, as the gen'lm'n said to the fi' pun' note.'

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1. Butt and Tillotson, p. 58.
   Dickens introduced this locution again with the Wellers in Master Humphrey's Clock: "Well, I'm agreeable to do it," said Sam, "but not if you go cuttin' away like that, as the bull turned round and mildly observed to the drover ven they wos a goadin' him into the butcher's door."
   Thus it seems to appear and disappear with the Wellers except for this instance in Nickleby, Chapter XVIII: "Poor dear thing," said Miss Knag, "it's not her fault. If it was, we might hope to cure it; but as it's her misfortune, Madame Mantilini, why really you know, as the man said about the blind horse, we ought to respect it."

'Oh, quite enough to get, Sir, as the **soldier** said when they ordered him three hundred and fifty lashes.'

'...vich I call addin' insult to injury, as the parrot said ven they not only took him from his native land, but made him talk the English languidge arterwards.'

This Wellerism may be described as an 'anecdotal' simile. Dickens's free use of it in Pickwick underlies that easy narrative 'flow' for which among all his novels it is second only to Copperfield. A simile is no doubt less condensed than a metaphor, but this 'anecdotal' simile is actually expansive, and not only does it help the story, but attunes it to humour as well. The reason is not far to seek: humour is expansive too, and laughter, its physical symptom, relaxes the body as well as eases the mind. That is why characters like Mrs. Nickleby, Mrs. Gamp, Mr. Micawber, and Flora Finching are primarily humorous because of their great capacity to expand volubly. Naturally this locution cannot yield an intense poetic effect, because that derives solely from a concentration of emotion, thought, and expression.

While to all appearance this Wellerism becomes extinct after the Clock, the fanciful mode of comparison continues till the very end as an essential feature of Dickensian humour:

'with that sort of half sigh, which, accompanied by two or three slight nods of the head, is pity's small change in general society.' (NN)

"I say...you haven't seen a silver pencil-case this morning, have you?"

"I saw one - a stout pencil-case of respectable appearance - but as he was in company with an elderly penknife and a young toothpick, with whom he was in earnest conversation, I felt a delicacy in speaking to him." (OCS)

"We are the two halves of a pair of scissors, when apart, Pecksniff." (MC)

'Childhood like money, must be shaken and rattled and jostled about a good deal to keep it bright.' (DS)

'Mr. Bounderby...stood stock-still in the street...swelling like an immense soap-bubble, without its beauty.' (HT)

'struck into the conversation like a clock, without consulting anybody.' (LD)

"You have no more nat'ral sense of duty than the bed of this here Thames river has of a pile, and similarly it must be knocked into you." (TTC)

'The great numbers on their backs, as if they were street doors...' (GE)

'stood him in a corner of the fireplace, like a wet umbrella.'

'her small official residence, with little windows like the eyes in needles, and little doors like the covers of school books.'

'opening and closing Georgina's arms like a pair of compasses.' (OMF)

'kind of human peg to hang his oratorical hat on.' (MED)

This novel, though somewhat artificial, side of Dickens's sense of comparison brings about that absence of feeling which, according to Bergson, usually accompanies laughter: 'the comic demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple.'[1] Nevertheless, the serious note that is struck in a subdued way in 'Criminal Courts', 'A Visit to Newgate', 'The Prisoners' Van', and 'The Drunkard's Death' in the Sketches and in the Fleet scenes in Pickwick, becomes increasingly pronounced and strong, and emotion begins to saturate imagery. And this process was accentuated by the fact that at this stage Dickens's work was touching upon certain episodes in his own life. The misery of a debtor in prison and the trials and temptations of being insufficiently fed were the painful memories of his own boyhood so that the sufferings

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1. Henry Bergson, Laughter, (1935) Ch. I, p. 5

of schoolboys in the matter of food and general treatment were not far from his own. Again, the early death of a beautiful innocent girl was a shock of his own youth. Thus, directly or indirectly, the very creative bases of Oliver, Nickleby, and the Curiosity Shop were autobiographical, and the writer's emotional participation in the action came more from experience than projection. Accordingly, there was a sort of ground swell in favour of 'perception' as against 'fancy' in regard to his sense of relationship in things. Luckily for Dickens, the Fleet, the Workhouse, the Yorkshire schools, and the hardships consequent on speculation came to fit so well into his own story. He could interpret the social and determine the moral as nobody else could, surely not the theorists of political economy, for he alone had seen the particular in the general.

One might say that after the Curiosity Shop Dickens knew his own power as never before. Comparisons between Little Nell and Cordelia, tributes from across the Atlantic, and unprecedented sales signified a universal acclaim. Now he could confidently speak in the voice of Scott, and perhaps far more pointedly than he. In Barnaby Rudge he assumed a representative role and addressed his age as a human and social moralist with a sense of history. Imaginatively inspired by Madge Wildfire in The Heart of Midlothian, he came to set the Porteous Riots of 1736 in relation to the Gordon Riots of 1780 and, trenchantly enough, to the contemporary Chartist unrest, too. This tone of authority in his work was much more important for his art than its capacity for public entertainment. Conscious of his acknowledged mastery, he became yet more possessed of purpose, and worked for maximum effect and impression. Thus the intensity of perception,

which his extraordinary animal sensibility called forth, was further sharpened by his rising status as a champion of social morality. In fact he was to exploit figures of speech even as a rhetorician would.

Another important factor, suggested earlier, was Dickens's tour of America and his descriptive account of it. His power of observation and his sense of comparison came into free play, but largely in the old fanciful way:

> 'These stumps of trees are a curious feature in American travelling. The varying illusions they present to the unaccustomed eye as it grows dark, are quite astonishing in their number and reality. Now there is a Grecian urn erected in the centre of a lonely field; now there is a woman weeping at a tomb; now a very common-place old gentleman in a white waistcoat, with a thumb thrust into each arm-hole of his coat; now a student poring on a book; now a crouching negro; now a horse, a dog, a cannon, an armed man; a hunch-back throwing off his cloak and stepping forth into the light.' (AN, Ch. XIV)

As this study will show, the Notes accelerated the pace of Dickens's progress towards symbolism through description, but what is of special interest here is that his impatience with the authors of 'cruelty and oppression' at home was augmented by their counterparts abroad. His satire against selfishness and hypocrisy, English as well as American, rose to a new fury in Chuzzlewit, so that Pecksniff was not conceived in a rhetorical key without significance. As the 'anecdotal' simile best characterized the Wellers's racy facetiousness, so would the sustained metaphor best define Pecksniff's moralistic pose:

> "Ah! It seems but yesterday that Thomas was a boy, fresh from a scholastic course. Yet years have passed, I think, since Thomas Pinch and I first walked the world together!..."
>
> "And Thomas Pinch and I...will walk it yet, in mutual faithfulness and friendship! And if it comes to pass that either of us be run over, in any of those busy crossings which divide the streets of life, the other will convey him to the hospital in Hope, and sit beside his bed in Bounty!" (MC, Ch. V)

> "What are we...but coaches? Some of us are slow coaches... some of us are fast coaches. Our passions are the horses: and rampant animals too!...and Virtue is the drag. We start from The Mother's Arms, and we run to The Dust Shovel." (MC, Ch. VIII)

> "For myself, my conscience is my bank. I have a trifle invested there - a mere trifle, Mr. Jonas, - but I prize it as a store of value, I assure you." (MC, Ch. XX)

The Pecksniffian speech is really in the tradition of Mantalini's and Dick Swiveller's, but he is designed for greater ends than even his successors Micawber and Chadband are to be.

Sustained comparison is markedly frequent. Young Martin suggests that Mark Tapley should paint the American Eagle 'as like an Eagle as he could', but he disagrees and says:

> "I should want to draw it like a Bat, for its short-sightedness: like a Bantam, for its bragging; like a Magpie, for its honesty; like a Peacock, for its vanity; like an Ostrich, for its putting its head in the mud, and thinking nobody sees it-"

And then Martin hopefully adds another simile to the list:

> "And like a Phoenix, for its power of springing from the ashes of its faults and vices, and soaring up anew into the sky!" (MC, Ch. XXXIV)

This highly purposive note perhaps finds a more pointed expression in A Christmas Carol, simultaneously with Chuzzlewit, and later in The Chimes. There Dickens employs all the ethereality of his imagination to vindicate all the grossness of his nature - eating and drinking and matrimony and procreation. The Christian virtues of benevolence and forgiveness are upheld, and the statistical theories of political economists satirized, and the machinery of ghosts and spirits appears to conform to an allegorical pattern. This trend, presumably deriving from the Pilgrim's Progress-like mould of the Curiosity Shop, shows Dickens moving through simile and metaphor and allegory towards symbolism. No wonder then that the 'waves' in Dombey are so outspoken.

But another major thrust towards this clear symbolic position came from the Pictures. This new descriptive work shows Dickens's 'perception' getting the better of his 'fancy' with regard to relations in things. There is far greater intensity than novelty. First, of 'fancy':

> 'an enormous plain, with jagged rows of irregular poplars on it, that look in the distance like so many combs with broken teeth:' (PI, 'Lyons, the Rhone,...')
>
> 'The frogs are company. There is a preserve of them in the grounds of the next villa; and after nightfall, one would think that scores and scores of women in pattens were going up and down a wet stone pavement without a moment's cessation.' (PI, 'Genoa and Its Neighbourhood')
>
> 'They [the houses] are very dirty...and emit a peculiar fragrance, like the smell of very bad cheese, kept in very hot blankets.' (IBid.)

'Perception' merges a little in 'fancy' in the last instance, but in the following it simply suffuses the whole figure:

> 'There lay before us, that same afternoon, the broken bridge of Avignon, and all the city baking in the sun; yet with an under-done-pie-crust, battlemented wall, that never will be brown, though it bake for centuries.' (PI, 'Lyons, the Rhone...')
>
> 'the vineyards are full of trees...each with its own vine twining and clustering about it. Their leaves are now of the brightest gold and deepest red; and never was anything so enchantingly graceful and full of beauty. Through miles of these delightful forms and colours, the road winds its way. The wild festoons, the elegant wreaths, and crowns, and garlands of all shapes; the fairy nets flung over great trees, and making them prisoners in sport; the tumbled heaps and mounds of exquisite shapes upon the ground; how rich and beautiful they are! And every now and then, a long, long line of trees, will be all bound and garlanded together: as if they had taken hold of one another, and were coming dancing down the field!' (PI, 'To Parma, Modena...')
>
> 'Then, there are the ponderous buildings reared from the spoliation of the Coliseum, shutting out the moon, like mountains: while here and there, are broken arches and rent walls, through which it gushes freely, as the life comes pouring from a wound.' (PI, 'Rome')

> 'What a bright noon it was, as we rode away! The Tiber was no longer yellow, but blue. There was a blush on the old bridges, that made them fresh and hale again. The Pantheon, with its majestic front, all seamed and furrowed like an old face, had summer light upon its battered walls.' (Ibid.)

> 'Against the Government House, against the old Senate House, round about any large building, little shops stick close, like parasite vermin to the great carcase. And for all this, look where you may: up steps, down steps, anywhere, everywhere: there are irregular houses, receding, starting forward, tumbling down, leaning against their neighbours, crippling themselves or their friends...until one, more irregular than the rest, chokes up the way, and you can't see any further.' (PI, 'Genoa and Its Neighbourhood')

What makes these descriptions vivid is the consistent strain of personification, one of the levels of reference bearing upon the human form and feeling. Indeed thus alone do phenomena best touch man - he perceives the relation between them and himself through his own sensuous mode, and lives with them. And it is this intense general reaction to external things, harnessed to a calculated particular effect, which in due time emerges as Dickensian symbolism. The Notes and the Pictures gave Dickens exclusive opportunities to respond to the physical, and Chuzzlewit and the Christmas tales, with their specially strong purposes behind them, naturally served as experimenting ground. Dombey is freshly informed with the symbolic method, but it definitely goes outside the transitional phase.

The fact that one of the terms of Dickensian comparisons is most often 'human' or sensuous, illustrates his imaginative preoccupation with the human form and his passionate craving for the gross. It also shows that the source of his creative art and social morality is the same, i.e., humanity, living humanity. In fact this only supports the earlier contention that Dickens admits of a free communion between the 'ghostly' in nature and the 'ghostly' in man.

The human spirit not only permeates through the physical shell of the body but also through the social coating of clothing; furthermore, it colours the phenomena around. And the reverse is equally true in Dickens: environment affects man, good or bad living conditions normally breeding good or bad citizens. In this he echoed the romantic individualism of English poetry on the one side and anticipated the scientific naturalism of French fiction on the other.[1] Thus in him character, action, scene, setting, and atmosphere run into one another to form a unity and reveal imaginative truth. Perhaps the evidence of this mutual reaction of the spiritual and the physical is most visible in his depiction of persons and places, and at an early stage. Arthur Gride's house is of a piece with himself:

> 'In an old house, dismal, dark and dusty, which seemed to have withered, like himself, and to have grown yellow and shrivelled in hoarding him from the light of day, as he had in hoarding his money, lived Arthur Gride. Meagre old chairs and tables of spare and bony make, and hard and cold as misers' hearts, were ranged in grim array against the gloomy walls; attenuated presses, grown lank and lantern-jawed in guarding the treasures they inclosed, and tottering, as though from constant fear and dread of thieves, shrunk up in dark corners, whence they cast no shadows upon the ground, and seemed to hide and cower from observation. A tall grim clock upon the stairs, with long lean hands and famished face, ticked in cautious whispers, and when it struck the time in thin and piping sounds, like an old man's voice, rattled as if 'twere pinched with hunger.' (NN, Ch. LI)

While this almost organic link between persons and places will be observed in some detail later on, the harmony of mood between nature and man may briefly be illustrated here.

Rejected by old Martin Chuzzlewit and dismissed by Pecksniff, young Martin leaves for London:

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1. Of course, writers like Emile Zola were themselves influenced by English scientists like Charles Darwin.

> 'It must be confessed that at that moment he had no very agreeable employment either for his moral or his physical perceptions. The day was dawning from a patch of watery light in the east, and sullen clouds came driving up before it, from which the rain descended in a thick, wet mist. It streamed from every twig and bramble in the hedge; made little gullies in the path; ran down a hundred channels in the road; and punched innumerable holes into the face of every pond and gutter. It fell with an oozy, slushy sound among the grass; and made a muddy kennel of every furrow in the ploughed fields. No living creature was anywhere to be seen. The prospect could hardly have been more desolate if animated nature had been dissolved in water, and poured down upon the earth again in that form.
>
> 'The range of view within the solitary traveller was quite as cheerless as the scene without. Friendless and penniless; incensed to the last degree; deeply wounded in his pride and self-love; full of independent schemes, and perfectly destitute of any means of realizing them; his most vindictive enemy might have been satisfied with the extent of his troubles. To add to his other miseries, he was by this time sensible of being wet to the skin, and cold at his very heart.' (MC, Ch. XIII)

Thus learning to meet in sympathy, man and nature will merge in each other under the stamp of a strong over-all purpose, and assume a symbolic aspect. The rain above distantly promises the rain in Lady Dedlock's Lincolnshire 'place' in Bleak House.

The point fundamentally involved here is that conceived in the inspired moment of artistic experience, a person or place wears one dominantly vivid trait, and further that executed in imaginative truth, it is bound to be suffused with this same trait. Dickens believed in the vitality and efficacy of such vision and depicted man and nature accordingly. Critics, literary and art, would dub characterization in this key caricature and regard the background and setting so wrought as vitiated by 'pathetic fallacy'. But time would in turn give the lie to these preceptors. For what Ruskin, in the true spirit of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, set out to condemn in landscape painting later came to reign supreme as Impressionism.

Dickens, like Shakespeare, was slave to no literary or art theories, his own genius being always his sole guide. Retaining his eye for realistic detail,[1] he spread that one dominant emotional response over the persons and places in his work which they elicited from him in the moment of conception. Fast bound to the physical, but also being overwhelmingly himself, he saw nature and man inseparably linked under the cloud of 'a predominant passion'. And this was to become the special mark of Impressionism:

> 'It is thus through the effect of a physical sensorial participation, as much as through that of a spiritual comprehension that the Impressionist painter adapts himself to the scene, grasps the meaning, really identifies himself with living forms, vibrating with the leaf, spreading with the waters, turning with the eddies of the waves and the air.'[2]

Naturally Dickens preferred French to English painting in the matter of 'character and purpose',[3] and the way his own descriptions were marked by these, accounts for the later critic's anxiety to see him in some relation to Impressionism.[4] In any case the credit for so anticipating an art movement which itself came to influence the twentieth-century English novel, should perhaps go more to Dickens than to Sterne.[5]

Dickens's power to discover and capture the one <u>essential</u> truth

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1. After all, 'the literary impulse towards Realism in life' was to be an important factor in the rise of the Impressionist movement itself. - R.O. Dunlop, <u>Landscape Painting</u> (1954), Ch. VIII, p. 101.
2. Andre Lhote, <u>Treatise on Landscape Painting</u> (1949), p. 32.
3. K.J. Fielding, <u>Charles Dickens, A Critical Introduction</u> (1958), p.141. While Dickens's interest in the contemporary English masters like Constable and Turner is obvious, it is highly probable that he appreciated Corot, Daumier, and Millet, especially Millet for his human representation of the hard peasant life.
4. J. Hillis Miller, <u>Charles Dickens</u> (1958), pp. 160-3.
5. E.A. Baker, <u>The History of the English Novel</u> (1930), Vol. IV, p. 263.

about a subject ultimately involves a generalization in terms of the dominant particular, and affects the static in men and things equally. But as in other respects, there is discernible a process of gradual development. A few instances seem necessary. First then of persons.

This is Mr. Grimwig from Oliver:

> 'At this moment, there walked into the room: supporting himself by a thick stick: a stout old gentleman, rather lame in one leg, who was dressed in a blue coat, striped waistcoat, nankeen breeches and gaiters, and a broad-brimmed white hat, with the sides turned up with green. A very small-plaited shirt frill stuck out from his waistcoat; and a very long steel watch-chain, with nothing but a key at the end, dangled loosely below it. The ends of his white neckerchief were twisted into a ball about the size of an orange; the variety of shapes into which his countenance was twisted, defy description. He had a manner of screwing his head on one side when he spoke: and of looking out of the corners of his eyes at the same time: which irresistibly reminded the beholder of a parrot.' (Ch. XIV)

The portrait is perhaps too much 'literal and catalogue-like'. Dickens's sense of comparison does not support it - neither fancifully nor perceptively.

This is Mr. Pecksniff from Chuzzlewit:

> 'Perhaps there never was a more moral man than Mr. Pecksniff: especially in his conversation and correspondence. It was once said of him by a homely admirer, that he had a Fortunatus's purse of good sentiments in his inside. In this particular he was like the girl in the fairy tale, except that if they were not actual diamonds which fell from his lips, they were the very brightest paste, and shone prodigiously. He was a most exemplary man: fuller of virtuous precept than a copy-book. Some people likened him to a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there: but these were his enemies; the shadows cast by his brightness; that was all. His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat...and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr. Pecksniff, "There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace: a holy calm pervades me." So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-gray, which was all brushed

off his forehead, and stood bolt upright, or slightly drooped in kindred action with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulency. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower, and dangling double eyeglass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, "Behold the moral Pecksniff!"' (Ch. II)

Lit by figures of speech, this picture is differently drawn.

And this Old Scrooge from the Carol:

'Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.' (Stave One)

This description is realized in the same dramatic and figurative key as Pecksniff's, but it is more intensely wrought.

This is Mr. Carker the Manager from Dombey:

'Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr. Carker the Manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the sky-light, playing his game alone.

'And although it is not among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr. Carker the Manager, as he basked in the strip of summer-light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr. Carker the Manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.' (Ch. XXII)

This portrait is an altogether different matter. The

transitional phase is over, and a dramatically extended metaphor reveals the whole man.

And this is Mr. Tulkinghorn from Bleak House:

'The old gentleman is rusty to look at, but is reputed to have made good thrift out of aristocratic marriage settlements and aristocratic wills, and to be very rich. He is surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences; of which he is known to be the silent depository. There are noble Mausoleums rooted for centuries in retired glades of parks, among the growing timber and the fern, which perhaps hold fewer noble secrets than walk abroad among men, shut up in the breast of Mr. Tulkinghorn. He is of what is called the old school...and wears knee breeches tied with ribbons, and gaiters or stockings. One peculiarity of his black clothes, and of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is, that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself. He never converses, when not professionally consulted. He is found sometimes, speechless but quite at home, at corners of dinner-tables in great country houses, and near doors of drawing-rooms, concerning which the fashionable intelligence is eloquent; where everybody knows him, and where half the Peerage stops to say, "How do you do, Mr. Tulkinghorn?" he receives these salutations with gravity, and buries them along with the rest of his knowledge.' (Ch. II)

'Here, among his many boxes labelled with transcendent names, lives Mr. Tulkinghorn, when not speechlessly at home in country-houses where the great ones of the earth are bored to death. Here he is to-day, quiet at his table. An Oyster of the old school, whom nobody can open...'

'Here, beneath the painted ceiling, with foreshortened Allegory staring down at his intrusion as if it meant to swoop upon him, and he cutting it dead, Mr. Tulkinghorn has at once his house and office. He keeps no staff; only one middle-aged man, usually a little out at elbows, who sits in a high Pew in the hall, and is rarely overburdened with business. Mr. Tulkinghorn is not in a common way. He wants no clerks. He is a great reservoir of confidences, not to be so tapped. His clients want him; he is all in all.' (Ch. X)

"Why, then I'll tell you, sir,...he is a confoundedly bad kind of man. He is a slow-torturing kind of man. He is no more like flesh and blood, than a rusty old carbine is. He is a kind of man - by George! - that has caused me more restlessness, and more dissatisfaction with myself, than all other men put together. That's the kind of man Mr. Tulkinghorn is!... He has got a power over me...as being able to tumble me out of this place neck and crop. He keeps me on a constant see-saw. He won't hold off, and he won't come on..." (Ch. XLVII)

> 'He passes out into the streets, and walks on, with his hands behind him, under the shadow of the lofty houses, many of whose mysteries, difficulties, mortgages, delicate affairs of all kinds, are treasured up within his old black satin waistcoat. He is in the confidence of the very bricks and mortar. The high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him. Yet there is not a voice in a mile of them to whisper, "Don't go home!"' (Ch. XLVIII)

This series of touches suggests the progress and end of a mysterious man, and with all the charm and power of poetic drama. Bleak House marks the consummation of Dickens's art, for a highly sensuous perception of the relations in men and things forms the very texture of its composition. A simple but clear illustration is a sustained metaphorical streak in Lady Dedlock's portrayal:

> [The Honourable Bob Stables] 'remarks, in commendation of her hair especially, that she is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud.' (Ch. II)

> [The Honourable Bob Stables] 'daily repeats to some chosen person, between breakfast and lunch, his favourite original remark, that she is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud.' (Ch. XXVIII)

> 'Thus rumour thrives in the capital... By half-past five, post meridian, Horse Guards' time, it has elicited a new remark from the Honourable Mr. Stables, which bids fair to outshine the old one... This sparkling sally is to the effect that, although he always knew she was the best-groomed woman in the stud, he had no idea she was a bolter. It is immensely received in turf circles.' (Ch. LVIII)

It is not wrong to say that each of the portraits seen above - excepting Mr. Grimwig's perhaps - lives primarily by virtue of a single 'predominant passion' that colours the entire physical detail and determines the whole cast of the figures of speech. Pecksniff with hypocrisy, Scrooge with coldness, Carker with treachery, Tulkinghorn with mystery - characters become interchangeable with qualities. But this is not in the way of 'humours' or types, because they are also highly individual. It is indeed peculiar how

the intensely perceived particular becomes the vividly wrought general, and enters the realm of abstraction, which is of symbolism itself, for a symbol, according to Susanne K. Langer, is 'any device whereby we are enabled to make an abstraction'.

The scenes and settings in Dickens are also like his 'very strongly marked' characters, and perhaps offend the devotee of the 'exact' as much. Of course there is the same process of development at work in the place descriptions as the following illustrations are expected to show.

This is Jacob's Island in Oliver:

> 'In Jacob's Island, the warehouses are roofless and empty; the walls are crumbling down; the windows are windows no more; the doors are falling into the streets; the chimneys are blackened, but they yield no smoke. Thirty or forty years ago, before losses and Chancery suits came upon it, it was a thriving place; but now it is a desolate island indeed. The houses have no owners; they are broken open, and entered upon by those who have the courage; and there they live, and there they die...' (Ch. L)

The description is bare. The sentiment for the poor is not informed with a sensuous comprehension of the scene.

This 'the Green Lanes' in Barnaby:

> 'This was a retired spot, not of the choicest kind, leading into the fields. Great heaps of ashes; stagnant pools, overgrown with rank grass and duckweed; broken turnstiles; and the upright posts of palings long since carried off for firewood, which menaced all heedless walkers with their jagged and rusty nails; were the leading features of the landscape...
>
> 'Poverty has its whims and shows of taste, as wealth has. Some of these cabins were turreted, some had false windows painted on their rotten walls; one had a mimic clock, upon a crazy tower of four feet high, which screened the chimney; each in its little patch of ground had a rude seat or arbour. The population dealt in bones, in rags, in broken glass, in old wheels, in birds, and dogs. These, in their several ways of stowage, filled the gardens; and shedding a perfume, not of the most delicious nature, in the air, filled it besides with yelps, and screams, and howling.' (Ch. XLIV)

The touch is deeper here, and there is a dramatic directness that moves as it shows.

And this is the brickmaker's in Bleak House:

> 'I was glad when we came to the brickmaker's house; though it was one of a cluster of wretched hovels in a brickfield, with pigsties close to the broken windows, and miserable little gardens before the doors, growing nothing but stagnant pools. Here and there, an old tub was put to catch the droppings of rain-water from a roof, or they were banked up with mud into a little pond like a large dirt-pie. At the doors and windows, some men and women lounged or prowled about, and took little notice of us, except to laugh to one another, or to say something as we passed, about gentlefolks minding their own business, and not troubling their heads and muddying their shoes with coming to look after other people's.' (Ch. VIII)

The earlier cataloguing impression has wholly disappeared. Purpose is no more distinguishable from perception, and simile and metaphor play their part.

Generally speaking the difference between any two place descriptions after the transitional phase is not great, because the Notes and the Pictures form a strong common support. For instance, this is Dr. Blimber's in Dombey:

> 'The Doctor's was a mighty fine house, fronting the sea. Not a joyful style of house within, but quite the contrary. Sad-coloured curtains, whose proportions were spare and lean, hid themselves despondently behind the windows. The tables and chairs were put away in rows, like figures in a sum; fires were so rarely lighted in the rooms of ceremony, that they felt like wells, and a visitor represented a bucket; the dining room seemed the last place in the world where any eating or drinking was likely to occur; there was no sound through all the house but the ticking of a great clock in the hall, which made itself audible in the very garrets; and sometimes a dull crying of young gentlemen at their lessons, like the murmurings of an assemblage of melancholy pigeons.' (Ch. XI)

And this Mr. Gradgrind's 'Stone Lodge' in Hard Times:

> 'A very regular feature on the face of the country, Stone Lodge was. Not the least disguise toned down or shaded off that uncompromising fact in the landscape. A great square house, with a heavy portico darkening the principal windows, as its master's heavy brows overshadowed his eyes. A calculated,

> cast up, balanced, and proved house. Six windows on this side of the door, six on that side; a total of twelve in this wing; a total of twelve in the other wing; four-and-twenty carried over to the back wings. A lawn and garden and an infant avenue, all straight like a botanical account-book. Gas and ventilation, drainage and water-service, all of the primest quality. Iron clamps and girders, fire-proof from top to bottom; mechanical lifts for the housemaids, with all their brushes and brooms; everything that heart could desire.' (Bk. I, Ch. III)

The places take a strong colouring from the persons, and the figures of speech deepen and intensify the impression.

As suggested earlier, Dickens's sense of comparison achieves its highest excellence in Bleak House, deserving to be mentioned with Shakespeare's. The fabric of the novel is shot through and through with simile and metaphor. This is Chancery in the long vacation:

> 'The Temple, Chancery Lane, Sergeants' Inn, and Lincoln's Inn even unto the Fields, are like tidal harbours at low water; where stranded proceedings, offices at anchor, idle clerks lounging on lop-sided stools that will not recover their perpendicular until the current of Term sets in, lie high and dry upon the ooze of the long vacation. Outer doors of chambers are shut up by the score, messages and parcels are to be left at the Porter's Lodge by the bushel. A crop of grass would grow in the chinks of the stone pavement outside Lincoln's Inn Hall, but that the ticket-porters, who have nothing to do beyond sitting in the shade there, with their white aprons over their heads to keep the flies off, grub it up and eat it thoughtfully.' (BH, Ch. XIX)

This is Chesney Wold under the moon:

> 'Now the moon is on high, and the great house, needing habitation more than ever, is like a body without life. Now, it is even awful, stealing through it, to think of the people who have slept in the solitary bedrooms: to say nothing of the dead. Now is the time for shadow, when every corner is a cavern, and every downward step a pit...' (BH, Ch. XL)

To have a look at another portrait, Mr. Krook's:

> 'He was short, cadaverous, and withered; with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders, and the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he looked from his breast upward, like some old root in a fall of snow.' (BH, Ch. V)

And this is a changing scene in the country:

> 'Railways shall soon traverse all this country, and with a rattle and a glare the engine and train shall shoot like a meteor over the wide night-landscape, turning the moon paler; but, as yet, such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected. Preparations are afoot, measurements are made, ground is staked out. Bridges are begun, and their not yet united piers desolately look at one another over roads and streams, like brick and mortar couples with an obstacle to their union; fragments of embankments are thrown up, and left as precipices with torrents of rusty carts and barrows tumbling over them; tripods of tall poles appear on hilltops, where there are rumours of tunnels; everything looks chaotic, and abandoned in full hopelessness. Along the freezing roads, and through the night, the post-chaise makes its way without a railroad on its mind.' (BH, Ch. LV)

Thus whether the picture is of idleness, shadows, disintegration or change, its tone-value entirely depends upon Dickens's command of image and metaphor, and this too seems to grow strong during the transitional phase. There are even glimpses of epic grandeur in Chuzzlewit:

> 'Louder and louder the deep thunder rolled, as through the myriad halls of some vast temple of the sky.' (MC, Ch. XLII)

However, there was a long way to go yet, and another important factor hastened the pace of the development. The tremendous part played by the Notes and the Pictures in this respect was complemented from March 1850 onwards by Household Words, for many of its issues, as of All the Year Round afterwards, contained descriptive articles by him, and probably the exceptional poetic intensity of Bleak House - first published, serially, from March 1852 - derived in some slight measure from them. Obviously, such support continued. For instance, the amplitude of metaphor in the extracts below is of the same sublime order.

It is an industrial area in winter. Amidst the universal white of the cold dead snow, hundreds of great fires blaze:

> 'the fire burns in its own sullen ferocity, and the snow lies impassive and untouched. There is a glare in the sky, flickering now and then over the great furnaces, but the earth lies stiff in its winding sheet, and the huge corpse candles burning above it affect it no more, than colossal tapers of state move dead humanity.' ('Fire and Snow', Household Words, January 21, 1854)

Mr. Gradgrind admits the failure of his 'system' before his ruined daughter, but he assures her of his good faith:

> 'In gauging fathomless deeps with his little mean excise-rod, and in staggering over the universe, with his rusty stiff-legged compasses, he had meant to do great things.' (HT, Bk. III, Ch. I)

Thus the emphasis ultimately falls on Dickens's rare sense of comparison and his abnormal animal sensibility, that is, on his sensuous perception of relations in things. He connects the 'ghostly' in man with the 'ghostly' in nature but only through a full experience of the physical. His depiction of persons and places, as well as his suggestion of the vital link between them, is only an illustration of this. After having viewed them apart it is perhaps necessary to see them come together, say, as dwellers and dwellings.

Before and during the transitional phase the house and the inmate appear largely as Arthur Gride in his house in Nickleby, or as Scrooge in his counting-house in the Carol, but afterwards the relationship between them becomes stronger and deeper, even symbolic. In Dombey, for instance, the house clearly stands for 'the one idea', that is, for the great firm, as well as family, of 'Dombey and Son':

> 'The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre.' (DS, Ch. I)

A perpetuation of prosperous pride through a male issue constitutes Mr. Dombey's predominant passion. The son dies and the father becomes one mighty blighting influence. This extract from the wonderful long description of 'the great dreary house' suggests the link between the dwelling and the dweller:

> 'The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired. The passive desolation of disuse was everywhere silently manifest about it. Within doors, curtains, drooping heavily, lost their old folds and shapes, and hung like cumbrous palls. Hecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up, shrank like imprisoned and forgotten men, and changed insensibly. Mirrors were dim as with the breath of years. Patterns of carpets faded and became perplexed and faint, like the memory of those years' trifling incidents. Boards starting at unwonted footsteps, creaked and shook. Keys rusted in the locks of doors. Damp started on the walls, and as the stains came out, the pictures seemed to go in and secrete themselves. Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets. Fungus trees grew in corners of the cellars. Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence nor how; spiders, moths, and grubs were heard of every day. An exploratory black-beetle now and then was found immovable upon the stairs, or in an upper room, as wondering how he got there. Rats began to squeak and scuffle in the night time, through dark galleries they mined behind the panelling.' (DS, Ch. XXIII)

But when, after Mr. Dombey's meeting with Edith, the perpetuation idea has a fair prospect of success, the old house has 'great alterations':

> 'There was a labyrinth of scaffolding raised all round the house from the basement to the roof. Loads of bricks and stones, and heaps of mortar, and piles of wood, blocked up half the width and length of the broad street at the side. Ladders were raised against the walls; labourers were climbing up and down; men were at work at the steps of the scaffolding; painters and decorators were busy inside; great rolls of ornamental paper were being delivered from a cart at the door; an upholsterer's waggon also stopped the way; no furniture was to be seen through the gaping and broken windows in any of the rooms; nothing but workmen, and the implements of their several trades, swarming from the kitchens to the garrets. Inside and outside alike: bricklayers, painters, carpenters, masons; hammer, hod, brush, pickaxe, saw, and trowel: all at work together, in full chorus!' (DS, Ch. XXVIII)

And then with the crash of the firm and the elopement of Edith, 'the one idea' of Mr. Dombey's life becomes a humiliated impossibility:

> 'The house stands, large and weather-proof, in the long dull street; but it is a ruin, and the rats fly from it...'
>
> 'Nothing is left about the house but scattered leaves of catalogues, littered scraps of straw and hay, and a battery of pewter pots behind the hall-door. The men with the carpet-caps gather up their screw-drivers and bed-winches with bags, shoulder them, and walk off. One of the pen and ink gentlemen goes over the house as a last attention; sticking up bills in the windows respecting the lease of this desirable family mansion, and shutting the shutters. At length he follows the men with the carpet-caps. None of the invaders remain. The house is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.' (DS, Ch. LIX)

In Copperfield dwellings seem to live only with dwellers. David imagines what his old home would be after the sale of the furniture and the departure of Mr. and Miss Murdstone:

> 'God knows I had no part in it while they remained there, but it pained me to think of the dear old place as altogether abandoned; of the weeds growing tall in the garden, and the fallen leaves lying thick and wet upon the paths. I imagined how the winds of winter would howl round it, how the cold rain would beat upon the window-glass, how the moon would make ghosts on the walls of the empty rooms, watching their solitude all night. I thought afresh of the grave in the churchyard, underneath the tree: and it seemed as if the house were dead too, now, and all connected with my father and mother were faded away.' (Ch. XVII)

Bleak House, by its very title, suggests the bleak nature of the stage that it sets, and of the actors that appear on it. This over-all connotation is underlined throughout by persons and places like Krook and his junk-shop, Mrs. Jellyby and her house, Mr. Tulkinghorn and his chambers, and the Smallweed family and their 'dark little parlour certain feet below the level of the street'.

In Hard Times Mr. Gradgrind and his 'Stone Lodge' merge in each other with a similar significance. And so do Mrs. Clennam and her dim abode in Dorrit:

> 'An old brick house, so dingy as to be all but black, standing by itself within a gateway. Before it, a square courtyard where a shrub or two and a patch of grass were as rank...as the iron railings enclosing them were rusty; behind it, a jumble of roots. It was a double house, with long, narrow, heavily framed windows. Many years ago, it had had it in its mind to slide down sideways; it had been propped up, however, and was leaning on some half-dozen gigantic crutches: which gymnasium for the neighbouring cats, weather-stained, smoke-blackened, and overgrown with weeds, appeared in these latter days to be no very sure reliance.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. III)

In Arthur Clennam's eyes this 'grim home of his youth' vitiates the whole neighbourhood with its secrecy and darkness:

> 'The shadow still darkening as he drew near the house, the melancholy room which his father had once occupied, haunted by the appealing face he had himself seen fade away with him when there was no other watcher by the bed, arose before his mind. Its close air was secret. The gloom, and must, and dust of the whole tenement, were secret. At the heart of it his mother presided, inflexible of face, indomitable of will, firmly holding all the secrets of her own and his father's life, and austerely opposing herself, front to front, to the great final secret of all life.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. X)

So there is perfect agreement between the dweller and her dwelling, and when after long years she steps out of it, it heaves, surges outward, opens 'asunder in fifty places', collapses, and falls. And she drops on the stones before the great heap of debris it becomes, and she lives and dies 'a statue'.

The same approach is visible in the picture of Mr. Meagles's house:

> 'It was a charming place...on the road, by the river, and just what the residence of the Meagles family ought to be. It stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the Year, as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees and spreading evergreens, as Pet was by Mr. and Mrs. Meagles. It was made out of an old brick house, of which a part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so there was a hale elderly portion, to represent Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion to represent Pet. There was even the later addition of a conservatory sheltering itself against it, uncertain of hue in its deep-stained glass, and in its more transparent portions

> flashing to the sun's rays, now like fire and now like harmless water drops; which might have stood for Tattycoram.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XVI)

In Great Expectations Miss Havisham and 'Satis House' point almost the same way as Mrs. Clennam and her house. But perhaps Our Mutual Friend makes the link between the inmate and the house clearer in so far as it contains some general observations on the point. Old Harmon's character is writ large on everything in the Bower:

> 'A gloomy house the Bower, with sordid signs on it of having been, through its long existence as Harmony Jail, in miserly holding. Bare of paint, bare of paper on the walls, bare of furniture, bare of experience of human life. Whatever is built by man for man's occupation, must, like natural creations, fulfil the intention of its existence, or soon perish. This old house had wasted more from desuetude than it would have wasted from use, twenty years for one.
>
> 'A certain leanness falls upon houses not sufficiently imbued with life (as if they were nourished upon it), which was very noticeable here. The staircase, balustrades, and rails, had a spare look - an air of being denuded to the bone - which the panels of the walls and the jambs of the doors and windows also bore. The scanty movables partook of it; save for the cleanliness of the place, the dust into which they were all resolving would have lain thick on the floors; and those, both in colour and in grain, were worn like old faces that had kept much alone.
>
> 'The bedroom where the clutching old man had lost his grip on life, was left as he had left it. There was the old grisly four-post bedstead, without hangings, and with a jail-like upper rim of iron and spikes; and there was the old patchwork counterpane. There was the tight-clenched old bureau, receding atop like a bad and secret forehead; there was the cumbersome old table with twisted legs, at the bedside; and there was the box upon it, in which the will had lain. A few old chairs with patchwork covers, under which the more precious stuff to be preserved had slowly lost its quality of colour without imparting pleasure to any eye, stood against the wall. A hard family likeness was on all these things.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XV)

Old Harmon's 'Bower' clearly points back to Arthur Gride's house in Nickleby.

This glance at Dickens's treatment of 'the house' shows how

consistently he tries to weld setting and character into a physical unity in the interests of a calculated effect. It is also clear that he prefers to realize this effect through description. Again, as seen all along, it is in description that his passion for the gross and his perception of relations in things best find gratification. How description came to be the general repository of his symbolism will be clear in the course of this study later on, but how it so developed in his hands had better be investigated here.

7

As remarked earlier, description involves a sensuous representation of the physical, and therefore directly bears on the five senses. The discussion of Dickens's 'portraiture' and 'landscape painting' above primarily gives an idea of the ceaseless activity of his highly developed visual sense, but the extracts quoted from his writings must also have shown that his other senses were also extraordinarily powerful. A few more hints in this connexion may however be given. For instance, this is a purely 'sound' approach to 'Greenwich Fair':

> 'Imagine yourself in an extremely dense crowd, which swings you to and fro, and in and out, and every way but the right one; add to this the screams of women, the shouts of boys, the clanging of gongs, the firing of pistols, the ringing of bells, the bellowings of speaking-trumpets, the squeaking of penny dittoes, the noise of a dozen bands, with three drums in each, all playing different tunes at the same time, the hallooing of showmen, and an occasional roar from the wild-beast shows; and you are in the very centre and heart of the fair.' (SB)

For the most notable, even pure, aural effects one may enter the world of The Chimes, the very conception of which came on the wings of sound.

David likes the smell of Yarmouth:

> 'When we got into the street...and smelt the fish, and pitch, and oakum, and tar...I felt that I had done so busy a place injustice.' (DC, Ch. III)

Again, James Harthouse enjoys his 'rare tobacco' on a bright morning:

> 'Reposing in the sunlight, with the fragrance of his pipe about him, and the dreamy smoke vanishing into the air, so rich and soft with summer odours, he reckoned up his advantages...' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. VIII)

Besides the clammy touch of Uriah's hand in Copperfield and the slimy 'witch-ointment' on the iron gate of the graveyard in Bleak House, one may quote a descriptive reference Dickens makes to the spitting habit of the Americans:

> 'And in every bar-room and hotel passage the stone floor looks as if it were paved with open oysters - from the quality of this kind of deposit which tesselates it all over...'[1]

And as for Dickens's sense of taste, it operates wherever eating and drinking figure in his work.

This extraordinary all-round capacity for sense-experience best provides for the ends of description, for when brought to bear upon the physical in man and nature, it renders its subject not in a 'literal and catalogue-like' manner but in a vivid lively way. Again, with setting and character so vitally blended for sensuous effect, action gets inevitably saturated with it, and thus description comes to give body to the story. As suggested earlier, it was the very condition of being for Dickens that he should especially devote himself to description, but it is clear that he took artistic pains to dress nature to advantage. One has only to observe how he wrings

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1. Letters, I, 394-5. To John Forster.

out every drop of value he can from the parts of speech. His fund of nouns is inexhaustible - how many 'things' he knows! In a moment he can pour out a whole flood of them, and the effect is overwhelming, bewildering. The panoramic view from the railway train in Dombey, and Krook's and Mrs. Jellyby's in Bleak House, among countless illustrations, may look like a hopeless confusion but the over-all artistic effect is that of unity in diversity. Naturally this great wealth of nouns serves as a great provision-house for comparison.

Furthermore, Dickens's vast range of experience having been born of his ceaseless activity, he is presupposed to revel in the use of verbs. But because in description action can, and in fact should, only be scenic, he sticks to an almost exclusive use of the intransitive verb and also to the present tense if the impression is to be pressingly dramatic. Again, to achieve the highest possible immediacy he very subtly either leaves out the auxiliary verb, relying entirely on the preposition and the participle, or does away with the verb altogether, depending wholly on the preposition. Two illustrations should suffice:

> 'Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, from the town, burrowing among the dwellings of men and making the streets hum, flashing out into the meadows for a moment, mining in through the damp earth, booming on in darkness and heavy air, bursting out again into the sunny day so bright and wide; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly with him: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!' (DS, Ch. XX)

> 'Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows, fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on

> the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs, fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships, fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.' (BH, Ch. I)

Dombey marks a real advance in the development of Dickens's symbolism along the descriptive line. In the extract above, for instance, not only is a panoramic view of the countryside given cinematographically, but also, through Mr. Dombey's eyes, steam locomotion is depicted as a symbol of Death. The whole effect of movement appears to derive from a masterly use of the preposition and a resistless rush of the noun.

In the autobiographical and dominantly narrative mould of Copperfield description could appear only fitfully and mingled with reminiscence, but in Bleak House it became the very basis of poetic beauty and symbolic power. From the stagnation in Chancery in the beginning to the decay in Chesney Wold towards the end, description holds real sway. In Hard Times Dickens found the difficulty of the space 'CRUSHING' because of its weekly publication,[1] as in the case of the Curiosity Shop earlier. But in spite of its tight design, description, in rendering Stone Lodge, Coketown, etc., maintained its important station, and continued to do so till the very close of his career. Marseilles, the Marshalsea, the Circumlocution Office, and the Simplon surroundings in Dorrit, the noisy Paris, the burning chateaux, and the quiet Soho corner in the Tale, the mists and marshes

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1. Letters, II, 543.

in Great Expectations,[1] the river in town and the country, the dust-heaps, Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock, and the social party reflected in the mirror at the Veneerings' in Our Mutual Friend, and Cloisterham and the Cathedral in Drood, all live by virtue of the sensuously created descriptive effects. How these depend upon Dickens's abnormal animal sensibility and extraordinary sharp-sightedness has already been seen, but how, with an over-riding social and human purpose, they become significant and symbolic remains to be discussed.

As suggested earlier, an 'infirmity to fancy or perceive relations in things' means a potentiality for dealing in all the wares of analogy and comparison, and a determination to 'pursue cruelty and oppression'[2] imposes a limitation on creative activity on the one hand, and impels it with an intense directed force on the other. There is an end, extraneous to the purely artistic, that is to be served, and hence there is a meaning, didactic or reformative one might say, that is to be conveyed. Thus there is also the rhetorician's need to persuade, and it is something different from the poet's need to bring about a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. A novelist with a 'purpose' then is both poet and rhetorician: he is to create as an artist but convince in a sense additional to that of art. For instance, in Bleak House such is Dickens's need to show that Chancery, with its inordinate delays, is causing infinite misery to the solicitors of justice, and the fact makes a difference for him from

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1. Description is a little subdued in Great Expectations as compared with the Tale, although both appeared as weekly serials. Probably because like Copperfield it was cast in the first person. Instead of the earlier sad tone of reminiscence, there is a sobering strain of disillusion here.
2. Letters, I, 313. To Revd. T. Robinson.

the very outset. When he depicts Chancery as a part of the vast muddy and foggy prospect on a raw November afternoon, he is only an artist, but when he says, 'The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest' near Chancery, and when he thinks this is 'appropriate ornament' for its threshold, he is donning the rhetorician also. The mud and fog are no longer the normal requisites of 'Implacable London weather' on a November afternoon; they are something more. They signify that a sticky and mystified activity is going on inside Chancery. They become symbolic.

Thus it can be argued that Dickens consciously and purposely opened the story of Bleak House in November amid mud and fog and soot and smoke, because, as suggested earlier, he liked to see man and nature working in harmony. How he has created this harmony here is easy enough to see. The impeding and sticky quality of mud and the blinding and confusing property of fog were well known to him as a Londoner, and so were the delays of Chancery which involved the Lord Chancellor, the clerks, the lawyers, and their unfortunate clients. There was a basic similarity between mud and fog on the one side and the fettered and deluded human endeavour in Chancery on the other. Dickens's 'infirmity' came in to 'perceive' the relation, and his artist's 'Seeing Eye' realized it as a symbol in a dramatic description of the physical.

In view of Dickens's special attention to description, the place he assigns to it in a novel in general, the care and pains he takes to make it live in his own work in particular, and the symbolic significance with which he usually imbues it, it will not be wrong to assert that it is one of the most important aspects of his work.

Especially from the transitional phase of Chuzzlewit onwards, it needs a very careful study in the context of his symbolism, and any assessment, which fails to realize this fact, incurs the danger of moving away from the heart of his art. Even the reader has to shed here the common prejudice against description in fiction. Perhaps Ivy Compton-Burnett did not lose much when she hurried through Jane Austen's 'words about Lyme and its surroundings, in order to return to her people',[1] but George Santayana surely lost a great deal when he skipped 'What the Waves were always Saying' in Dombey, and he rightly confessed that the fault was his and not Dickens's.[2]

Dickens is a 'poetic dramatist', and the body of his 'poetic drama' lies in his descriptions. One may, if one has no eye for beauty, read Chaucer's Knight's Tale skipping the description of the Temple of Mars and the paintings on its wall, but one cannot read Keats's Eve of St. Agnes omitting, e.g., the descriptions of the chapel aisle, the hall, the 'ancient Beadsman' and 'Old Angela'. Or, returning to the earlier comparison with Shakespeare - he wrote for a theatre without scenery and was like a novelist in this respect - one may say that Shakespeare cannot be read without his descriptions like those of Agincourt, Ophelia's 'muddy death', and the Dover cliff. Similarly if Dickens is to be read, his descriptions cannot be skipped. The objective reality of the world of his novels is embodied in them: setting, scene, atmosphere, character, action, all form one living organism.

As pointed out above, Dickens's social and human purposes

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1. Ivy Compton-Burnett, 'A Conversation Between I. Compton-Burnett and M. Jourdain', Orion (1945).
2. George Santayana, 'Dickens', The Dial (New York), November 1921.

demanded from him greater and intenser effects which he came to achieve by referring the reader's imagination to more than one level of experience, the meaning remaining the same at each but getting emphasis through repetition. Symbolism was therefore his art's answer to the claims of his life and time. How this answer vindicates these claims, and what value it has in universal, rather than European or Western, terms this study will attempt to show. The method it seeks to follow is to categorize the symbols created and used by Dickens roughly under three heads, namely, 'Elemental', 'Universal', and 'Topical', and to trace their development in his work. It does not entertain any staggering ambitious project of a thorough investigation into imagery which a great scholar like Caroline Spurgeon dared to achieve in respect of Shakespeare, and of the dangers of embarking upon which another great scholar like Una Ellis-Fermor[1] warned all future adventurers. It will only take the various Dickensian symbols, one by one, and follow their growth and function from end to end, drawing, one might say, cross-sectional curves over his writings arranged more or less chronologically. Generally speaking, this study will regard all Dickens's novels as a unity. Over the last decade or so a number of books have appeared on the subject, taking each of his novels as a separate artistic entity, and therefore this study can try to plough long, lonely furrows in the whole vast field of his work, and see if they form any pattern in its over-all appreciation.

A word more about the classification hinted at above. Under

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1. Una Ellis-Fermor, Some Recent Research in Shakespeare's Imagery (1937), pp. 5-13.

'Elemental' are grouped symbols like 'river', 'dust', 'fog', and 'fire', under 'Universal' those like 'Time' and 'journey', and under 'Topical' the railway train and the prison. As is clear, this categorization cannot be taken as rigid, for some of the symbols may as easily be put under one head as under another. For instance, 'fire' from under 'Elemental' and the prison from under 'Topical' may be placed beside 'Time' and 'journey' under 'Universal'. It is, however, hoped that this minor fact will not defeat the object of this study in any way.

The development of Dickens's imagery into symbolism is to be traced in the section immediately following, i.e, the Illustration. The special emphasis being throughout on description, and this being profuse in Dickens,[1] and the whole of his work being the concern of these pages, extracts - very often long - have continually to be quoted. All tendency to over-quote has been vigilantly restrained, but excesses in this regard may have crept in. It is hoped that this study will not appear in an unfavourable light on that account. Where critics like Humphry House and F.R. Leavis have felt tempted,[2] a student of Dickens, who has only tried to enjoy and appreciate him in a particular way, may well have succumbed to the artist's irresistible charm.

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1. Forster, IX, I, 727 :
   'In regard to mere description, it is true, he let himself loose more frequently, and would sometimes defend it even on the ground of art.'
2. Humphry House, The Dickens World, (1942), Ch. VI, p. 145. Quoting passage after passage of description, House says: 'It is painful to stop quoting...'
   F.R. Leavis, 'Hard Times: An Analytic Note', The Great Tradition, (1948), p. 246.
   'But the packed richness of Hard Times is almost incredibly varied, and not all the quoting I have indulged in suggests it adequately.'

I L L U S T R A T I O N

(A) - 'E L E M E N T A L'

1 - THE PERVERSE ELEMENT

'Water is a perverse sort of element' - The Mudfog Papers

In this section will be assessed the functional value of the river and sea images, and it will be seen how they develop into symbols calculated to serve the highest ends of art. But before embarking upon this enquiry it is perhaps necessary briefly to put the subject in a proper perspective. In Dickens water figures as a great mysterious power, and so do the three other elements in their various divisions like 'fog' and 'storm', 'light' and 'fire', and 'dust' and 'mud'. Somehow these elemental symbols invariably link human sensibility with the eternal mystery of things and thus enrich and deepen man's sense of life.

Great Britain being an island, and the British being among the old maritime nations of the world, the sea should naturally be of special meaning to them. As a Briton, Dickens knew that meaning, and as a Londoner, his interest in the Thames was only more real.[1] Again, much of Defoe's work, and a little of Swift's, told of the sea. And so did Smollett's Roderick Random[2] which seems to have particularly fascinated Dickens. But all these were tales of adventure with a background of the sea, and perhaps it is more relevant to mention here an elder contemporary of his, Frederick Marryat, who between the channels of the 'fashionable' romance and the 'Newgate' novel

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1. Dickens could take a 'trip down the river in the Thames police launch'. See Humphry House, The Dickens World, (1942) Ch. VII, p. 202.
2. David Copperfield, Chs. V and VI.

continued to steer his 'water' stories.[1] Thus the element was in a way present in the existing fiction climate.

In the Sketches appear 'The River' and 'The Tuggs's at Ramsgate'. While the former treats of water-parties, rowing-matches, and the steam-wharf scenes, the latter tells how the Tuggs's celebrate their success with a 'long-pending law-suit' by taking a holiday on board a Ramsgate steamer, and how they are easily duped by three designing impostors. However, the Thames, the sands, and the sea figure only as a matter of ordinary course and even sentences like this are rare: 'The sun was shining brightly; the sea, dancing to its music, rolled merrily in.'

But the conclusion of 'The Drunkard's Death' is different. Having been the complete ruin of his home and family, the heartless miserable addict commits suicide near Waterloo Bridge:

> 'The tide was in, and the water flowed at his feet. The rain had ceased, the wind was lulled, and all was, for the moment, still and quiet - so quiet that the slightest sound on the opposite bank, even the rippling of the water against the barges that were moored there, was distinctly audible to his ear. The stream stole languidly and sluggishly on. Strange and fantastic forms rose to the surface, and beckoned him to approach; dark gleaming eyes peered from the water, and seemed to mock his hesitation, while hollow murmurs from behind, urged him onwards. He retreated a few paces, took a short run, desperate leap, and plunged into the river.' (SB, 'The Drunkard's Death')

This is important, because death by water is eventually to become an effective theme in Dickens.

The description of the scene around the Medway in Pickwick is

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1. In the context of Dickens, Jacob Faithful (1834) may be of special importance for at least two reasons. First, it is more of a river than of a sea story. Second, it may have provided Dickens with a useful precedent in the matter of Spontaneous Combustion. See Appendix B, p. 439.
   Again, it may be of interest to compare Dickens's American Notes (1842) with Marryat's Diary in America (1839).

worth noting. Leaning over the balustrades of Rochester Bridge, Mr. Pickwick is 'contemplating nature':

> 'The river, reflecting the clear blue of the sky, glistened and sparkled as it flowed noiselessly on; and the oars of the fishermen dipped into the water with a clear and liquid sound, as their heavy but picturesque boats glided slowly down the stream.' (PP, Ch. V)

This is really refreshing, but there is an abrupt change in the tone when a little later 'the dismal man' says to Mr. Pickwick:

> '"Did it ever strike you, on such a morning as this, that drowning would be happiness and peace?"
>
> '"God bless me, no!" replied Mr. Pickwick...'
>
> '"I have thought so, often... The calm, cool water seems to me to murmur an invitation to repose and rest. A bound, a splash, a brief struggle; there is an eddy for an instant, it gradually subsides into a gentle ripple; the waters have closed above your head, and the world has closed upon your miseries and misfortunes for ever."'[1] (Ibid.)

The passage recalls the suicide in the Sketches and suggests the mysterious appeal and promise of the element to an unhappy frustrated nature.

The sea figures indirectly in Pickwick in 'The old man's tale about the queer client'. George Heyling is in the Marshalsea. His child dead, his wife's body removed in a coffin from the prison, he is laid up with high fever, and he dreams:

> 'He was sailing over a boundless expanse of sea, with a blood-red sky above, and the angry waters lashed into fury beneath, boiling and eddying up, on every side...' (PP, Ch. XXI)

Then amid the shipwreck he sees his own father-in-law, who has

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1. Martin Steinmann, Jr. in 'Water and Animal Symbolism in T.F. Powys', English Studies, December 1960, quotes from Powys's Unclay where the pond has "a special status as an agent of death":
   "...it tempted, it fascinated. It was said that to drown oneself there gave no pain. One had only to step in, and sink at once. Drowning there was thought to be a pleasure. Little children, in times past, had ventured, and old men. The pond pitied all men's sorrows and the relief that it gave was death."

been the ruin of him, and he kills him by dragging him beneath the water. Yet again he dreams he is wandering in a desert. He is exhausted and falls senseless on the ground:

> 'What fragrant coolness revived him; what gushing sound was that? Water! It was indeed a well; and the clear fresh stream was running at his feet. He drank deeply of it, and throwing his aching limbs upon the bank, sunk into a delicious trance.' (Ibid.)

He again hears his father-in-law approaching. He thrusts himself between him and the water, and the old man drops dead.

The human situation remains the same in each dream, i.e., life plagued by revenge, but the human behaviour reveals the two opposite powers of the element, life-taking and life-giving. Thus in Pickwick water appears to be related to an abnormality, temperamental or circumstantial, which may operate at a conscious or sub-conscious level. And as compared with the Sketches this is perhaps a step forward.

In Oliver the river assumes significance as an important scene of action. The 'solitary house: all ruinous and decayed' - off Shepperton - which Sikes visits with Oliver before attempting the burglary, stands close to a bridge:

> '"The water!" thought Oliver, turning sick with fear. "He has brought me to this lonely place to murder me!"' (OT, Ch. XXI)

Mr. and Mrs. Bumble and Monks meet in the large building 'skirting the river' to bargain over dead secrets concerning Oliver:

> 'The rat, the worm, and the action of the damp, had weakened and rotted the piles on which it stood; and a considerable portion of the building had already sunk down into the water beneath; while the remainder, tottering and bending over the dark stream, seemed to wait a favourable opportunity of following its old companion, and involving itself in the same fate.' (OT, Ch. XXXVIII)

Then Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow meet Nancy on the steps on the Surrey bank at midnight, with Noah Claypole round the corner stealthily overhearing them. Nancy has been haunted by 'shrouds with blood upon them' and visions of 'coffin' written 'in large black letters'. Rose wonders "what...can be the end of this poor creature's life," and Nancy says:

> "What!... Look before you, lady. Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing to care for, or bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last." (OT, Ch. XLVI)

And there is the place called 'Jacob's Island'[1] surrounded by the muddy Folly Ditch, 'a creek or inlet from the Thames'. It is on the roof of one of the houses there that an angry crowd makes Sikes slip into a halter of his own making.

In all the above instances the river appears under cover of darkness, and secrecy is the key-note. Perhaps it follows that Dickens suggests some sort of kinship between the dark dealings of men and the mysterious element.

Nancy's suggestion of her possible death by water seems to recall what 'the dismal man' told Mr. Pickwick about drowning. But the words "How many times do you read of such as I..." in the last extract from Oliver show that the implication here is as social as individual.

The Old Curiosity Shop shows on 'the Surrey side of the river... a small rat-infected dreary yard' called Quilp's Wharf with a little

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1. It was on this, 'the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary, of the many localities that are hidden in London', that Dickens took to task Sir Peter Laurie, an Alderman, in his preface to the 1850 edition of Oliver.

wooden counting-house:

> 'Neither did the place present any extraordinary aspect of life or activity, as its only human occupant was an amphibious boy in a canvas suit, whose sole change of occupation was from sitting on the head of a pile and throwing stones into the mud when the tide was out, to standing with his hands in his pockets gazing listlessly on the motion and on the bustle of the river at high-water.' (OCS, Ch. IV)

That is the setting for the demoniac dwarf Quilp and his impish page Tom Scott, but radically different is the vision of the river which Little Nell and her grandfather entertain. The old man says:

> "...we will travel afoot through fields and woods, and by the side of rivers, and trust ourselves to God in the place where He dwells. It is far better to lie down at night beneath an open sky like that yonder - see how bright it is - than to rest in close rooms which are always full of care and weary dreams..." (OCS, Ch. XII)

Nell sees the promise:

> "Sun, and stream, and meadow, and summer days, shone brightly in her view, and there was no dark tint in all the sparkling picture." (Ibid.)

And she speaks in an encouraging tone:

> "You remember that we said that we would walk in woods and fields, and by the side of rivers, and how happy we would be - you remember that?..." (OCS, Ch. XXIV)

These extracts strike a note of peace, and it is not the peace of melancholic escape valued by 'the dismal man', nor is it the peace of desperate hopelessness suggested by Nancy. No, it is not the peace of death; it is rather the peace of life, the relief of the pent-up spirit, the repose of the tired senses under the healing influence of nature. Dickens is very much of a Wordsworthian here.

Thus the river in the country seems to be a different matter from the river in town. There it consorts with men, but here it is in fellowship with nature, and this distinction will continue till the Our Mutual Friend stage.

The same note is continued, but it becomes much more pronounced. Nell is out of the town where Mrs. Jarley's wax-works are showing:

> 'in one of those wanderings at the quiet hour of twilight, when sky, and earth, and air, and rippling water, and sound of distant bells, claimed kindred with the emotions of the solitary child...light had faded into darkness and evening deepened into night, and still the young creature lingered in the gloom; feeling a companionship in nature so serene and still, when noise of tongues, and glare of garish lights would have been solitude indeed.
>
> 'She raised her eyes to the bright stars... She bent over the calm river, and saw them shining in the same majestic order as when the dove beheld them gleaming through the swollen waters, upon the mountain tops down far below, and dead mankind, a million fathoms deep.' (OCS, Ch. XLII)

Nell and her grandfather are with the hearty rugged men who have given them shelter in their boat:

> 'They had for some time been gradually approaching the place for which they were bound. The water had become thicker and dirtier; other barges coming from it passed them frequently; the paths of coal-ash and huts of staring brick, marked the vicinity of some great manufacturing town...' (OCS, Ch. XLIII)

Thus the river takes a hue from the places it passes by. While town pollutes it, the country brings out in full relief its peaceful tone.

The comparison of life with a river is an old commonplace of literature, but perhaps it is worth while to see how Dickens makes artistic capital out of it. After all it is from the rudiments of simile and metaphor that the meaning of a developing symbol springs.

A suggestive note is struck in the very beginning. The burdens of real life contemplate the reminder of eternal peace from a bridge:

> 'Then the crowds for ever passing and repassing on the bridges...where many stop on fine evenings looking listlessly down upon the water with some vague idea that by-and-by it runs between green banks which grow wider and wider until at last it joins the broad vast sea - where some halt to rest from heavy loads and think as they look over the parapet that to smoke and lounge away one's life, and lie sleeping in the sun upon a hot tarpaulin, in a dull slow sluggish barge, must be happiness

> unalloyed - and where some...pause with heavier loads than they, remembering to have heard or read in some old time that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide the easiest and best.' (OCS, Ch. I)

Dick Swiveller's figures of speech reveal the secret of the heart:

> "I shall ask your ladyship's permission to put the board in my pocket, and to retire from the presence when I have finished this tankard; merely observing, Marchioness, that since life like a river is flowing, I care not how fast it rolls on, ma'm, on, while such purl on the bark still is growing, and such eyes light the waves as they run. Marchioness, your health..." (OCS, Ch. LVIII)

There is another division of water that has been made to bear a likeness to life, and that is the well. The sexton tells Nell the strange story of 'a deep, dark, echoing well' in the church which dried up in some thirty years' time -

> "What is it but a grave!... What else! And which of our old folks, knowing all this, thought, as the spring subsided, of their own failing strength, and lessening life? Not one!" (OCS, Ch. LIII)

It is significant that Dickens makes a church with this and other quaint, solemn, peaceful features the scene of Nell's passing away. In striking contrast with this is the end of Quilp. It is on a 'good, black, devil's night' that while having 'a fireside to himself' and enjoying himself 'alone' in his counting-house, he oversets the stove and rushes out to meet his doom:

> '...he staggered and fell; and next moment was fighting with the cold dark water.
>
> 'The strong tide filled his throat, and bore him on, upon its rapid current.
>
> 'Another mortal struggle, and he was up again, beating the water with his hands, and looking out with wild and glaring eyes that showed him some black object he was drifting close upon. The hull of a ship! He could touch its smooth and slippery surface with his hand. One loud cry now - but the resistless water bore him down before he could give it utterance, and, driving him under it, carried away a corpse.

> 'It toyed and sported with its ghastly freight, now bruising it against the slimy piles, now hiding it in mud or long rank grass, now dragging it heavily over rough stones and gravel, now feigning to yield it to its own element, and in the same action luring it away, until, tired of the ugly plaything, it flung it on a swamp - a dismal place where pirates had swung in chains, through many a wintry night - and left it there to bleach.' (OCS, Ch. LXVII)

It is a real, active part that the river plays here. But Dickens makes Quilp die by water and not by fire which was turning the counting-house into 'a blazing ruin'. Perhaps that would have been a less ignominious death. As things are, one may think that the image of the slowly drying-up well in the church beautifully reveals the course of an angelic life, while that of a swampy river-bank overlooked by a gibbet powerfully exposes the rush of a Satanic existence. And the interesting fact is that this effect in contrast has been achieved through two divisions of the same element - water.

During his sojourn in America and Canada, Dickens journeyed mostly by railroad and by canal and river, and in the Notes he wrote at length about the Susquehanna, the Alleghany, the Ohio, the Mississippi, and the St. Lawrence.

The town of Lowell gives a character to the river:

> 'The very river that moves the machinery in the mills...seems to acquire a new character from the fresh buildings of bright red brick and painted wood among which it takes its course; and to be as light-headed, thoughtless, and brisk a young river, in its murmurings and tremblings, as one would desire to see.' (AN, Ch. IV)

The Ohio feels for the 'host of Indians' who lie buried in the 'great mound':

> 'The very river, as though it shared one's feelings of compassion for the extinct tribes who lived so pleasantly here, in their blessed ignorance of white existence, hundreds of years ago, steals out of its way to ripple near this mound: and there

are few places where the Ohio sparkles more brightly than in the Big Grave Creek.' (AN, Ch. XI)

The river is depicted in the extracts above almost in human terms: it is an impressionable as well as reacting force. And Dickens can give it a villainous character too. The 'great father of rivers, who (praise be to heaven) has no young children like him!' is a monster:

'the hateful Mississippi circling and eddying...and turning off upon its southern course a slimy monster hideous to behold...

'An enormous ditch, sometimes two or three miles wide, running liquid mud, six miles an hour: its strong and frothy current choked and obstructed everywhere by huge logs and whole forest trees.' (AN, Ch. XII)

The contrast affects the senses:

'we had the satisfaction of seeing that intolerable river dragging its slimy length...and ugly freight abruptly off towards New Orleans; and passing a yellow line which stretched across the current, were again upon the clear Ohio, never, I trust, to see the Mississippi more, saving in troubled dreams and nightmares. Leaving it for the company of its sparkling neighbour, was like the transition from pain to ease, or the awakening from a horrible vision to cheerful realities.' (AN, Ch. XIV)

The change from the Ohio mood to the Niagara mood is a change from 'cheerful realities' to spiritual ecstasy:

'We were at the foot of the American Fall. I could see an immense torrent of water tearing headlong down from some great height, but had no idea of shape, or situation, or anything but vague immensity.

'When we were seated in the little ferry-boat, and were crossing the swollen river immediately before both cataracts, I began to feel what it was: but I was in a manner stunned, and unable to comprehend the vastness of the scene. It was not until I came on Table Rock, and looked - Great Heaven, on what a fall of bright-green water! - that it came upon me in its full might and majesty.

'Then, when I felt how near to my Creator I was standing, the first effect and the enduring one - instant and lasting - of the tremendous spectacle was Peace. Peace of mind, tranquillity, calm recollections of the Dead, great thoughts of Eternal Rest and Happiness: nothing of gloom or terror. Niagra was at once stamped upon my heart, an Image of Beauty; to remain there, changeless and indelible, until its pulses cease to beat, for ever.

'Oh, how the strife and trouble of daily life receded from my view, and lessened in the distance, during the ten memorable days we passed on that Enchanted Ground! What voices spoke from out the thundering water; what faces, faded from the earth, looked out upon me from its gleaming depths; what Heavenly promise glistened in those angels' tears, the drops of many hues, that showered around, and twined themselves about the gorgeous arches which the changing rainbows made!

'I never stirred in all that time from the Canadian side, whither I had gone at first. I never crossed the river again; for I knew there were people on the other shore, and in such a place it is natural to shun strange company. To wander to and fro all day, and see the cataracts from all points of view... watching the river as, stirred by no visible cause, it heaved and eddied and awoke the echoes, being troubled yet, far down beneath the surface, by its giant leap; to have Niagra before me, lighted by the sun and by the moon, red in the day's decline, and grey as evening slowly fell upon it; to look upon it every day, and wake up in the night and hear its ceaseless voice: this was enough.

'I think in every quiet season now, still do those waters roll and leap, and roar and tumble, all day long; still are the rainbows spanning them, a hundred feet below. Still, when the sun is on them, do they shine and glow like molten gold. Still, when the day is gloomy, do they fall like snow, or seem to crumble away like the front of a great chalk cliff, or roll down the rock like dense white smoke. But always does the mighty stream appear to die as it comes down, and always from its unfathomable grave arises that tremendous ghost of spray and mist which is never laid: which has haunted this place with the same dread solemnity since Darkness brooded on the deep, and that first flood before the Deluge - Light - came rushing on Creation at the word of God.' (AN, Ch. XIV)

It seems Dickens passed through a trance, had a vision of the mysterious, eternal truth, held a direct communion with his Maker. Surely the majesty and beauty of nature could not move him more, and the Wordsworthian trait in him found its fullest expression here.

In Chuzzlewit the sea appears with a vessel on it, i.e., as it appeared in Pickwick in a troubled dream, but obviously with a different purpose and to a different effect. There it was revenge and imaginary wreck, here it is real combat and triumph:

'Here! Free from that cramped prison called the earth, and out upon the waste of waters. Here, roaring, raging, shrieking, howling, all night long. Hither come the sounding voices from the caverns on the coast of that small island, sleeping a thousand miles away so quietly in the midst of angry waves; and hither, to meet them, rush the blasts from unknown desert places of the world. Here, in the fury of their unchecked liberty, they storm and buffet with each other, until the sea, lashed into passion like their own, leaps up in ravings mightier than theirs, and the whole scene is whirling madness.

'On, on, on, over the countless miles of angry space roll the long heaving billows. Mountains and caves are here, and yet are not; for what is now the one, is now the other; then all is but a boiling heap of rushing water. Pursuit, and flight, and mad return of wave on wave, and savage struggle, ending in a spouting-up of foam that whitens the black night; incessant change of place, and form, and hue; constancy in nothing, but eternal strife; on, on, on, they roll, and darker grows the night, and louder howls the wind, and more clamorous and fierce become the million voices in the sea, when the wild cry goes forth upon the storm "A ship!"

'Onward she comes, in gallant combat with the elements, her tall masts trembling, and her timbers starting on the strain; onward she comes, now high upon the curling billows, now low down in the hollows of the sea, as hiding for the moment from its fury; and every storm-voice in the air and water, cries more loudly yet, "A ship!"'[1] (MC, Ch. XV)

The ship appears to symbolize man's heroic struggle against the forces of nature.

In The Chimes Trotty Veck lodges Will Fern and little Lilian at his house and is blessed with a vision attended by 'voices', 'shadows' and 'figures'. The dream concludes with Meg ready to drown herself and Trotty struggling to save her:

'...she set its sleeping face against her: closely, steadily, against her: and sped onward to the River.

'To the rolling River, swift and dim, where Winter Night sat brooding like the last dark thoughts of many who had sought a

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1. The repetition of "A ship!" at the end of a paragraph may be compared with a similar repetition of "Death!" in Dombey, Chapter XX, entitled "Mr. Dombey goes upon a journey".

> refuge there before her. Where scattered lights upon the banks gleamed sullen, red, and dull, as torches that were burning there, to show the way to Death. Where no abode of living people cast its shadow, on the deep, impenetrable, melancholy shade.
>
> 'To the River! To that portal of Eternity, her desperate foot-steps tended with the swiftness of its rapid waters running to the sea.
>
> 'She paused a moment on the brink, before the dreadful plunge...'

The drowning theme is again presented here with the same social concern as shown in Nancy's speech; but in this dream-world of The Chimes the river image is far more profound and mysterious than it was ever before. Its exceptional power seems to come partly from the atmosphere of half-lights and low tones and partly from the suggestion of loneliness and action.

In the Pictures the colours seem to run for excess of water. Besides many streams and rills, there are the Rhine, the Tiber, and the Velino. Again, there are fountains, and there are lakes, of water and of lava, and then there is the sea coming in, not always but often.

Venice is a 'strange dream upon water'. The Piazza, the Palace, the Cloisters, the galleries, the Cathedral, the Bridge of Sighs - all seem to float on water. The 'old wicked Council' had its innocent captives strangled in 'that murky prison':

> 'Around this dungeon stronghold, and above some part of it: licking the rough walls without, and smearing them with damp and slime within: stuffing dank weeds and refuse into chinks and crevices, as if the very stones and bars had mouths to stop: furnishing a smooth road for the removal of the bodies of the secret victims of the State - a road so ready that it went along with them, and ran before them, like a cruel officer - flowed the same water that filled this Dream of mine, and made it seem one, even at the time.' (PI, 'An Italian Dream')

There is a sense of 'luxurious wonder':

> 'I rowed off to a kind of garden or public walk in the sea,

> where there were grass and trees... I stood upon its farthest brink - I stood there, in my dream - and looked, along the ripple, to the setting sun; before me, in the sky and on the deep, a crimson flush; and behind me the whole city resolving into streets of red and purple, on the water.' (Ibid.)

And this sums up the magic of the dream, of course, in dissolving colours:

> 'But close about the quays and churches, palaces and prisons: sucking at their walls, and welling up into the secret places of the town: crept the water always. Noiseless and watchful: coiled round and round it, in its many folds, like an old serpent: waiting for the time, I thought, when people should look down into its depths for any stone of the old city that had claimed to be its mistress.' (Ibid.)

The above extracts show that Dickens's sense of the element has become intense and profound, finding expression in rich poetic imagery. Water has a mysterious charm and is full of wiles like the original tempter.

A question may perhaps be asked here: Why does Dickens connect dreams with water? In Pickwick the sea and in The Chimes the river appear in dreams. Again, what Dickens said in the Notes may be recalled here: 'never, I trust, to see the Mississippi more, saving in troubled dreams and nightmares.'

Does it follow then that George Heyling and Trotty Veck see water 'in troubled dreams and nightmares'" And does it again follow that when Dickens calls Venice a 'dream upon water' he means by dream something fleeting and beautiful? Perhaps the answer is yes in each case. But most probably the reason is more fundamental so that the connexion between dreams and water can be generally accounted for. Perhaps mysteriousness forms a common basis.

Dickens's handling of the element shows a gradual change in this respect. From the Notes onwards water seems to take a position

independent of man. Not only can temperament and circumstance drive him to it; it also mysteriously draws him to itself.

Dombey marks a very important stage in the development of the water symbol. It can perhaps be said that Dickens consciously tried to achieve through it the maximum possible effect. Almost the entire novel bears testimony to this fact.

Mrs. Dombey dies holding Florence in her last embrace:

> 'Thus, clinging fast to that slight spar within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world.' (DS, Ch. I)

Awaking suddenly from a long quiet sleep, Paul listens, starts up, and sits listening. Florence asks him what he thinks he hears, and he answers:

> '"I want to know what it says... The sea, Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?"
>
> 'She told him that it was only the noise of the rolling waves.
>
> '"Yes, yes," he said. "But I know that they are always saying something. Always the same thing..."
>
> '...very often afterwards, in the midst of their talk, he would break off, to try to understand what it was the waves were always saying...' (DS, Ch. IX)

Paul defends old Glubb against Mrs. Blimber's unwarranted attacks:

> "He's a very nice old man, Ma'am,... He used to draw my couch. He knows all about the deep sea, and the fish that are in it, and the great monsters that come and lie on rocks in the sun, and dive into the water again when they're startled, blowing and splashing so, that they can be heard for miles... And though old Glubb don't know why the sea should make me think of my mamma that's dead, or what it is that it is always saying - always saying! he knows a great deal about it." (DS, Ch. XII)

He begins to connect death with the sea, and both with himself. He tells Toots he thinks 'about a great many things':

"If you had to die," said Paul, looking up into his face -

.....

" - Don't you think you would rather die on a moonlight night, when the sky was quite clear, and the wind blowing, as it did last night?"

.....

"Not blowing, at least...but sounding in the air like the sea sounds in the shells. It was a beautiful night. When I had listened to the water for a long time, I got up and looked out. There was a boat over there, in the full light of the moon: a boat with a sail."

.....

"A boat with a sail...in the full light of the moon. The sail was like an arm, all silver. It went away into the distance, and what do you think it seemed to do as it moved with the waves?"

.....

"It seemed to beckon,...to beckon me to come!..." (DS, Ch. XII)

The wind sounding through the air like the sea sounds in the shells, the full light of the moon, and the boat with a silvery sail like an arm are charming attendant images wrought on a ground-pattern of the waves. A sense of impending death is created, but through highly tender and poetic touches.

Chapter XVI entitled 'What the waves were always saying' contains the account of Paul's death, and the whole rare atmosphere has been evoked through the recurring image of the waves.

Paul lies languishing day by day:

'His only trouble was, the swift and rapid river. He felt forced sometimes, to try to stop it - to stem it with his childish hands - or choke its way with sand - and when he saw it coming on, resistless, he cried out!...he told Floy of his dream, and smiled.

'he pictured to himself - pictured! he saw - the high church towers rising up into the morning sky, the town reviving, waking,

starting into life once more, the river glistening as it rolled (but rolling fast as ever), and the country bright with dew.

'he...would fall asleep, or be troubled with a restless and uneasy sense again - the child could hardly tell whether this were in his sleeping or his waking moments - of that rushing river. "Why, will it never stop, Floy?" he would sometimes ask her. "It is bearing me away, I think!"'

'Thus, the flush of the day, in its heat and light, would gradually decline; and again the golden water would be dancing on the wall.'

'How many times the golden water danced upon the wall; how many nights the dark dark river rolled towards the sea in spite of him; Paul never counted, never sought to know.'

'The train of thought suggested to him to inquire if he had ever seen his mother; for he could not remember whether they had told him yes, or no, the river running very fast, and confusing his mind.'

'Sister and brother wound their arms around each other, and the golden light came streaming in, and full upon them, locked together.

'"How fast the river runs, between its green banks and the rushes, Floy! But it's very near the sea. I hear the waves! They always said so!"

'Presently he told her that the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest. How green the banks were now, how bright the flowers growing on them, and how tall the rushes! Now the boat was out at sea, but gliding smoothly on. And now there was a shore before him. Who stood on the bank!

.....

'The golden ripple on the wall came back again, and nothing else stirred in the room. The old, old fashion! The fashion that came in with our first garments, and will last unchanged until our race has run its course, and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll. The old, old fashion - Death!

'Oh thank God, all who see it, for that older fashion yet, of Immortality! And look upon us, angels of young children, with regards not quite estranged, when the swift river bears us to the ocean!' (DS, Ch. XVI)

The thought and imagery of the last two paragraphs mark a climax to the highly suggestive tone of the whole chapter, and it is through

the river and sea symbols, operating in sleeping and waking moments, that the eternal mysteries of Life and Death and Immortality have been approached.

Paul dies, but the river and the sea do not disappear from the scene. The images linger in Florence's memory and haunt her imagination:

> 'The golden water she remembered on the wall, appeared to Florence, in the light of such reflections, only as a current flowing on to rest, and to a region where the dear ones, gone before, were waiting, hand in hand; and often...she looked upon the darker river rippling at her feet...' (DS, Ch. XXIV)

The symbolic background of Paul's death is shifted on to Mrs. Skewton's, and as Florence watched her brother pass away, so does Edith see her mother die.

These extracts are from Chapter XLI - 'New voices on the waves':

> 'Night after night, the light burns in the window, and the figure lies upon the bed, and Edith sits beside it, and the restless waves are calling to them both the whole night long. Night after night, the waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery; the dust lies piled upon the shore; the sea-birds soar and hover; the winds and clouds are on their trackless flight; the white arms beckon, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away.'

> 'Such is the figure that is often wheeled down to the margin of the sea, and stationed there; but on which no wind can blow freshness, and for which the murmur of the ocean has no soothing word. She lies and listens to it by the hour; but its speech is dark and gloomy to her, and a dread is on her face, and when her eyes wander over the expanse, they see but a broad stretch of desolation between earth and heaven.'

And then she is shown lying dead:

> 'So Edith's mother lies unmentioned of her dear friends, who are deaf to the waves that are hoarse with repetition of their mystery, and blind to the dust that is piled upon the shore, and to the white arms that are beckoning, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away. But all goes on, as it was wont, upon the margin of the unknown sea; and Edith standing there alone, and listening to its waves, has dank weed cast up at her feet, to strew her path in life withal.' (DS, Ch. XLI)

One may like to imagine how the river and sea symbols took shape in the novel. Most probably it was Paul's death which called forth the highly tender and innocent idea of the voices in the waves, and this idea was to be executed in a rare but elaborate atmosphere. After all, the boy's death was to form the ground-plan of the entire structure and had thus to be a long affair. It is remarkable how by virtue of the water images the relevant parts - scattered between Chapter VIII and Chapter XVI - get an artistic unity. Without them so much could not have been held together so beautifully and so effectively.

It is worth noting that it is Paul alone who says he hears voices in the waves. Florence takes them on trust from him, and later they become a connecting medium between her and her departed brother. Mrs. Skewton and Edith say nothing about the waves although they are both shown as listening to them. Dickens, however, chooses to determine their futures - the mother's Hereafter and the daughter's Here - in terms of Paul's dream images. Why does he do so? Is it because he regards an innocent child's visions of eternal peace as an ideal yard-stick for measuring any soul's stature? Or, is it because the suggestive basis of these visions is all-inclusive and - with suitable minor variations - capable of universal application? Or again, is it because through the water images he intends to give a symbolic unity to the whole book? Perhaps there is an element of truth in each proposition, and the discussion of one means the discussion of all.

Considering how easily capable of allegorical interpretation elemental symbols have always been, and remembering how the various water images have figured in Dickens's work before Dombey, it can be

safely asserted that he looked upon the river as suggestive of human life and the sea as symbolic of eternity. These could certainly function as basic images for depicting the closing of life on Mrs. Dombey, Paul, and Mrs. Skewton.[1] Dickens introduces the sea image with Mrs. Dombey's death, and it produces a tone of sad calm. But there is a sharp contrast between the cases of Paul and Mrs. Skewton. Perhaps they illustrate the philosophy of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode[2] with the difference that they point towards eternity ahead rather than behind in the pre-natal abode; and possibly the poem was Dickens's immediate 'source'. Paul hears the waves call, sees golden ripples on the wall, feels the swift river rush past green banks with bright flowers and tall rushes, is out at sea, his boat gliding on, reaches the other shore, and finds his mamma standing before him.

It is entirely different with Mrs. Skewton. 'Ugly and haggard', she is 'wakeful and complaining'. She lies and listens to the murmur of the ocean, but its speech is dark and gloomy to her, and a dread is on her face. She looks at the dust piled upon the shore. Before her is nothing 'but a broad stretch of desolation between earth and heaven'.

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1. Carker's end is unattended by these images. The explanation may be that he dies an accidental, violent death, and that as a villain from a shipping concern he deserves meeting a monster from railway business.
2. Cf. Sketches by Boz, Ch. XX, 'The First of May':
   'But what are the deep forests, or the thundering waters, or the richest landscapes that bounteous nature ever spread, to charm the eyes, and captivate the senses of man, compared with the recollection of the old scenes of his early youth? - Magic scenes indeed; for the fairy thoughts of fancy dressed them in colours brighter than the rainbow, and almost as fleeting; colours which are the reflection only of the sparkling sunbeams of childhood, and can never be called into existence in the dark and cloudy days of after-life!'

And then she sees a 'stone arm' raised to strike her!

The basic symbols for life and eternity are there, but by a subtle variation of subsidiary images an entirely different atmosphere has been evoked and a completely different effect realized. There is an aura of heavenly bliss around the child but an air of divine wrath about the woman. That this contrast was intentionally introduced and consciously worked out is beyond doubt:

> 'andwhile Florence, sleeping in another chamber, dreams lovingly, in the midst of the old scenes, and their old associations live again, the figure which in grim reality is substituted for the patient boy's on the same theatre, once more to connect it - but how differently! - with decay and death, is stretched there...' (DS, Ch. XLI)

It is remarkable that the very sea imagery which brings out a contrast between the futures of the dying, i.e, Paul and Mrs. Skewton, also reflects a contrast between the destinies of the living, i.e., Edith and Florence.

An earlier quotation may be repeated here:

> 'But all goes on, as it was wont, upon the margin of the unknown sea; and Edith standing there alone, and listening to its waves, has dank weed cast up at her feet, to strew her path in life withal.'

Striking a general as well as a particular note, these few words hold an uncommon measure of importance. The immediate concern here being Edith, it is better first to take up the latter.

At Paul's death the images auxiliary to the river symbol are green banks, bright flowers and tall rushes, while at Mrs. Skewton's they are the dust piled upon the shore, the stone arm raised to strike her, and the white beckoning arms in the moonlight. Very significantly Dickens links up the fortunes of Florence and Edith with these respective

images. In the case of Edith he enhances the suggestive power of the pattern by adding 'dank weed' to it. Her loneliness, her unhappiness, her disgrace, her second 'widowhood' - all is ominously told, although actually it is to come some ten chapters later. The great artistic gain is that a sense of impending fate has been created and the reader's curiosity heightened.

Florence is, however, shown to react to Paul's dream legacy in affection and hope:

> 'The golden water she remembered on the wall, appeared to Florence, in the light of such reflections, only as a current flowing on to rest, and to a region where the dear ones, gone before, were waiting, hand in hand; and often she looked upon the darker river rippling at her feet, she thought with awful wonder, but not terror, of that river which her brother had so often said was bearing him away.'

She being marked for the ends of life, the very voices and visions, about which Paul used to tell her, put on a semblance of love. It is night, and she and her husband are sitting on the moonlit deck. She is hearing the sea and watching it:

> 'And the voices in the waves are always whispering to Florence, in their ceaseless murmuring, of love - of love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of this world, or by the end of time, but ranging still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away!' (DS, Ch. LVII)

Thus the dread eternal mystery of death is dissolved into the measureless immortal bliss of love, the ultimate truth that gives and preserves life.

The general note referred to, in the words re-quoted above, is more pronounced and objective here:

> 'Florence hurried away in the advancing morning, and the strengthening sunshine, to the City. The roar soon grew more

> loud, the passengers more numerous, the shops more busy, until she was carried onward in a stream of life setting that way, and flowing, indifferently, past marts and mansions, prisons, churches, market-places, wealth, poverty, good, and evil, like the broad river side by side with it, awakened from its dreams of rushes, willows, and green moss, and rolling on, turbid and troubled, among the works and cares of men, to the deep sea.' (DS, Ch. XLVIII)

The passage of a year is also indicated in terms of sea imagery:

> 'The sea had ebbed and flowed, through a whole year. Through a whole year, the winds and clouds had come and gone; the ceaseless work of Time had been performed, in storm and sunshine. Through a whole year, the tides of human chance and change had set in their allotted courses.' (DS, Ch. LVIII)

But this year is every year! And the sea ebbs and flows always and for ever!

Dickens perhaps suggests that men and women in their everyday toil and trouble do not seem to be conscious of that eternal mystery of life which so inevitably surrounds them. They do not realize that their grand pageant of existence stands on the brink of an unknown sea to which each one of them is being borne by a swift and resistless current, and which keeps telling them what deserts theirs can be, bright flowers or dust-piles, love-murmurs or dank weeds.

The didactic purpose is more than manifest and in the same old Dickensian vein. Affection and humility and love - as represented by Paul, Florence, and Walter - and not pride and selfishness and haughtiness - as represented by Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Skewton, and Edith - are the assets of life.

It is perhaps to be noted that the river and the sea exist in their own right in the story, being never far from Mrs. Pipchin's 'Castle' or Dr. Blimber's Academy, from Sol Gills's establishment or

Sir Barnet Skettles's villa. The important scenes of illness and death, first of Paul and then of Mrs. Skewton's, are laid on the seaside. In fact all this is just as it should be, for what is to be a symbol must be a physical fact where it is to function as such; otherwise the design would be only metaphorical or, at a longer stretch, allegorical, and the effect altogether different. The allegorical process addresses the understanding and is oppressive, the meaning dogging the word all the time and squaring up with it throughout. But the symbolic process woos the imagination and is elusive, the word never paying fully but ever promising to pay more than is due, and thus the meaning is being revealed as well as concealed, continually advancing and retreating, as it were.

Dickens exhibits a great sense of balance in this respect. The sea is so very much in the physical scheme of the novel that its symbolic quality stands out as natural and inevitable. 'Dombey and Son' is a shipping house; the Wooden Midshipman is an establishment full of nautical instruments; Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle are brimming over with sea episodes and so is young Walter himself; Captain Bunsby adequately represents the mysterious aspect of the element; the Son and Heir is a trading vessel with foundering reports trailing behind it, and then there are the voyages of Uncle Sol and Walter and Florence. All this and the seaside scenes mentioned earlier have gone to make the world of Dombey. From the explicit instance of the name of the ship, 'Son and Heir', which is wrecked on the sea and which suggestively confirms the death of the 'Dombey and Son' idea and the failure of the firm, to the subtlest possible

symbolic note in all the relevant paraphernalia, which are scattered from the beginning to the end of the book, an inference can be drawn that Dickens made a conscious and sustained effort to inform it, as a whole and in every part, with one significant quality, and that he did succeed in achieving in it a rich symbolic organism.

In Copperfield the river and the sea figure very prominently, but in their symbolic use Dickens seems to glance back rather than look ahead. And this in two senses. First, he reverts to the old matter of circumstances forcing a person to seek release through death by water. Second, there is far less emphasis - perhaps hardly any - on the element represented as mirroring eternity. The reason appears to lie in the specially gross quality of the book, determined perhaps by the theme of the 'mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart'. The demands of David's animal spirits are almost as callous as the repression he is made to undergo so that dissipation comes with opportunity. The Micawbers try to eat and drink better than their means or circumstances allow. Martha and Em'ly succumb to carnal temptation, as, of course, do their seducers. The villainies of Littimer and Heep also lie in the field of solid matter. Thus the novel is generally directed towards this-worldliness rather than other-worldliness, and this very much limits the scope of symbolic activity which invariably presupposes a general, subjective level of reference. Probably the autobiographical aspect of the work also hampered this process of manifold vision, for when things touch the writer's person so immediately - and in this case so poignantly - it is not so easy to take a detached view of them.

The sea directly and the river indirectly gain access to the story through David's nurse, Peggotty. Her home at Yarmouth, 'That ship-looking thing' in David's words, reminds him of 'Aladin's palace, roc's egg and all', and he is charmed with 'the romantic idea' of living in it. The particular reason why it so captivates him is 'that it was a real boat which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of times, and which had never been intended to be lived in, on dry land'. As the peaceful life of its simple, sincere inhabitants is marked by painful change, this object of romance appears to assume a somewhat symbolic aspect.

Steerforth, a youthful representative of elegant town life, is walking beside David, over the dark wintry sands, towards the old boat, the wind sighing around them mournfully:

> '"This is a wild kind of place, Steerforth, is it not?"
>
> '"Dismal enough in the dark," he said; "and the sea roars as if it were hungry for us. Is that the boat, where I see a light yonder?"
>
> '"That's the boat," said I.
>
> '"And it's the same I saw this morning," he returned, "I came straight to it, by instinct I suppose."'

In this dialogue the words, "the sea roars as if it were hungry for us", and "by instinct", are perhaps the shadows of coming events. No less significant is how and what Steerforth says, and how it is received:

> 'Steerforth told a story of a dismal shipwreck (which arose out of his talk with Mr. Peggotty),[1] as if he saw it all before

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1. Perhaps Dickens was conscious that the ominous impression designed by 'a story of a dismal shipwreck' told by Steerforth might be thought too deliberate and forced, and he had to justify it by the parenthesis.

him - and little Em'ly's eyes were fastened on him all the time, as if she saw it too.' (DC, Ch. XXI)

It may look a little far-fetched, but perhaps it can be said that these subtle touches do forebode ill to the happy little world of the 'old boat'. They appear to suggest the wreck it will become primarily through Steerforth and Emily. But there is also a deeper cause which, in the ethics of Dickens,[1] is a great evil, and it lies in Mr. Peggotty. He expresses his love and concern for his niece:

> "I don't know how long I may live, or how soon I may die; but I know that if I was capsized, any night, in a gale of wind in Yarmouth Roads here, and was to see the town-lights shining for the last time over the rollers as I couldn't make no head against, I could go down quieter for thinking 'There's a man ashore there, iron-true to my little Em'ly, God bless her, and no wrong can touch my Em'ly while so be as that man lives.'" (Ibid.)

Springing from this great affection or existing in its own right, there is a vanity in Mr. Peggotty that Dickens needs must punish. Ham speaks about Martha:

> "It's a poor wurem, Mas'r Davy...as is trod under foot by all the town. Up street and down street. The mowld of the churchyard don't hold any that the folk shrink away from, more." (DC, Ch. XXII)

Such a Martha is not fit company for Mr. Peggotty's beloved Em'ly:

> "Em'ly couldn't speak to her theer, for her loving uncle was come home, and he wouldn't - no, Mas'r Davy,...he couldn't, kind-natur'd, tender-hearted as he is, see them together, side by side, for all the treasures that's wrecked in the sea." (Ibid.)

Yet in the scene at the Barkis's, irony lurks partly in Martha's words to Em'ly, "I was once like you," and partly in Em'ly's to Ham, "Oh, I am not as good a girl as I ought to be."

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1. With Nancy's better feelings struggles her pride, 'the vice of the lowest and most debased creatures no less than of the high and self-assured'. (OT, Ch. XL)

And when at last the bolt has hit, Peggotty and Ham are both 'as grave and steady as the sea itself'. The uncle says it is his 'dooty' to seek Em'ly 'evermore', and David asks him if he will desert the old boat:

> "My station, Mas'r Davy,...ain't there no longer; and if ever a boat foundered, since there was darkness on the face of the deep, that one's gone down..." (DC, Ch. XXXII)

A long time later one night the 'wanderer' and David see Martha and follow her to the river:

> 'As soon as she came here, and saw the water, she stopped as if she had come to her destination; and presently went slowly along by the brink of the river, looking intently on it.' (DC, Ch. XLVII)

It appears she is related to the element:

> 'As if she were a part of the refuse it had cast out, and left to corruption and decay, the girl we had followed strayed down to the river's bank, and stood in the midst of this night-picture, lonely and still, looking at the water.' (Ibid.)

She is 'absorbed in gazing at the water...in an unsettled and bewildered way, more like the action of a sleep-walker than a waking person', and David grasps her arm, saying "Martha!" She utters a scream, struggles with him, and is finally carried away from the water by him and Mr. Peggotty. She moans 'holding her wretched head with both her hands':

> '"Oh, the river!" she cried passionately. "Oh, the river!"
>
> '"Hush, hush!" said I. "Calm yourself."
>
> 'But she still repeated the same words, continually exclaiming, "Oh, the river!" over and over again.
>
> '"I know it's like me!" she exclaimed. "I know that I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it - and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable - and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled - and I feel that I must go with it!"
>
> .....

'"I can't keep away from it. I can't forget it. It haunts me day and night. It's the only thing in all the world that I am fit for, or that's fit for me. Oh, the dreadful river!"' (Ibid.)

Later she tries to convince them that she has not misled Em'ly at all:

'"I should have been in the river long ago," she said, glancing at it with a terrible expression, "if any wrong to her had been upon my mind. I never could have kept out of it a single winter's night, if I had not been free of any share in that!"' (Ibid.)

At last Mr. Peggotty gently raises her from the stones:

"Martha,...God forbid as I should judge you. Forbid as I, of all men, should do that, my girl! You doen't know half the change that's come, in course of time, upon me, when you think it likely... You doen't understand how 'tis that this here gentleman and me has wished to speak to you..." (Ibid.)

His pride has brought him low. He is seeking help from the same fallen creature with whom he would not like to see his niece, and that niece is now herself fallen like her.

Martha does not want assistance for her promise to help them in their search for Em'ly:

"To give me money would be to take away your trust, to take away the object that you have given me, to take away the only certain thing that saves me from the river." (Ibid.)

She has at last got a foothold in life:

"I am afraid to think so; it seems too bold. If any good should come of me, I might begin to hope; for nothing but harm has ever come of my deeds yet. I am to be trusted, for the first time in a long while, with my miserable life..." (Ibid.)

Later when Em'ly has been found through Martha's efforts, Mr. Peggotty is relating his niece's hardships:

"She was wild. She ran along the sea beach, believing the old boat was theer..."

"She recollects, as if she had dreamed it, that she lay there, always a talking her own tongue, always believing as the old boat was round the next pint in the bay,..."

> "She came, white and hurried, upon Em'ly in sleep. She says to her, 'Rise up from worse than death, and come with me!' Them belonging to the house would have stopped her, but they might as soon have stopped the sea. 'Stand away from me,' she says, 'I am a ghost that calls her from beside her open grave!'..." (DC, Ch. LI)

It seems that besides emphasizing the topicality of efforts to redeem fallen women, Martha, as well as the old boat, plays a symbolic part. At least the biblical tone of her words in the last extract above gives that impression. Her fall exposes Mr. Peggotty's pride and prepares him for punishment which he is awarded in the form of Em'ly's fall. He does penance as a 'wanderer', learns humility through the erring Martha and recovers the erring Em'ly. Martha also illustrates the need of giving hope and trust to the fallen in order to raise them again. Society must hold up the candle to beckon them back from the darkness. Others in the boat also learn from the calamity. Ham realizes that he has been forcing his affections on Em'ly, and even Mrs. Gummidge can be 'loving and patient now':

> "I know you think that I am lone and lorn; but deary love, 'tan't so no more! I ain't sat here, so long, a watching, and a thinking of your trials, without some good being done me..." (Ibid.)

Then after Em'ly has been recovered, one night the old boat is left 'close shut up, a dark speck in the cloudy night'. But it cannot exist even as 'a dark speck'; sitting in it, Steerforth and Em'ly have 'seen' a shipwreck; and Mr. Peggotty has marked it as 'gone down'. And an unprecedented tempest arrives to spell its total physical doom:

> 'As the high watery walls came rolling in, and at their highest, tumbled into surf, they looked as if the least would engulf the town. As the receding wave swept back with a hoarse roar, it seemed to scoop out deep caves in the beach, as if its purpose were to undermine the earth... Undulating hills were changed to valleys; undulating valleys were...lifted up to hills;

> masses of water shivered and shook the beach with a booming sound; every shape tumultuously rolled on, as soon as made, to change its shape and place, and beat another shape and place away; the ideal shore on the horizon, with its towers and buildings, rose and fell; the clouds flew fast and thick; I seemed to see a rending and upheaving of all nature.' (DC, Ch. LV)

In this dreadful tumult of the elements Ham dies in an attempt to save Steerforth whose body is washed ashore:

> 'And on that part of it where she and I had looked for shells, two children - on that part of it where some lighter fragments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind - among the ruins of the home he had wronged - I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.' (Ibid.)

So the old boat goes down at last.

It is perhaps interesting to see how the water symbols contributed to that 'unity of drift or purpose',[1] which, according to John Forster, was 'apparent always', and what part they were designed to play in a story which Dickens 'carefully planned out'... 'to the end'.[2] A glance at the various monthly number plans and chapter notes[3] reveals some significant facts. Whether the entries regarding the old boat,[4] the river,[5] and the sea[6] were made before or after the actual writing was done, it is clear that they specially claimed Dickens's attention. Most probably the note - under Chapter XLVII, in No. XVI -

> Martha
>
> Vauxhall Bridge
> Oh the river oh the river!
> Emily will be the means of her redemption[5]

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1. Butt and Tillotson, p. 114.
2. Ibid., p. 164.
3. Ibid., pp. 114-176.
4. Ibid., pp. 116, 169.
5. Ibid., p. 163.
6. Ibid., pp. 161, 169.

was made before the chapter was written. Two reasons may perhaps be assigned. First, the exclamatory tone and repeated emphasis of 'Oh the river oh the river!' actually guide the whole treatment of the river in this chapter, and there is nothing to be seen about it in the following number, or for that matter even later on, to justify the presence of the entry as a convenient foothold for memory. Second, the purpose of the future tense in 'Emily will be the means of her redemption' is actually fulfilled in this very chapter. Martha has been given trust and hope, and she has pledged herself to help in the search of Em'ly. She is redeemed the moment she receives the confidence of Mr. Peggotty. Moreover, nothing follows in the later course of the story by way of her redemption, unless it should mean her joining the emigrants and getting a husband in Australia, which would indeed be a cheap interpretation of the sublime word.

As for the handling of the sea and the dreadful storm, through these Dickens intended to achieve 'the most powerful effect in all the Story'.[1] No wonder then that in writing Chapter LV, 'Tempest', he was 'completely knocked...over'.[2] There is perhaps no gainsaying the fact that great fore-thought and studied labour went into charging the old boat, the river, and the sea with whatever symbolic intent they have come to hold.

One is led to ask, "After all, what is it that the old boat connotes?" Perhaps there is no direct and definite answer, but a few points bearing on the matter may be stated.

Taking the story as a whole it is not too much to say that there

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1. Letters, II, 234.
2. Forster, VI, VII, 536-6.

is no other scene of action which stimulates the reader's interest and haunts his imagination as the old boat. David's affairs, after he has received shelter at Miss Trotwood's, do not remain very absorbing; even his love for Dora and their married life are without an exceptionally fascinating quality. Again, neither the straitened circumstances of the Micawbers nor the base villainies of Heep and Littimer have any positive attraction. What really holds the middle of the imaginative stage is the old boat with its handful of inhabitants. It is the story of their fortunes that is uniformly scattered over fifty-five of the total sixty-four chapters. David first sees 'That ship-looking thing' in the beginning of Chapter III, and he finds 'fragments of the old boat, blown down last night', at the end of Chapter LVII. This prominence of treatment and the many subtle touches - some cited above - which are met with almost everywhere in the book, tend to make the old boat more than what it is.

With David's 'Arabian Nights' vision one may think the old boat is an object of wonder from the dreamland of romance - 'Aladin's palace or roc's egg and all'. From Mr. Peggotty's simple and traditional viewpoint it may be recognized as a way of life, proud, pure, and peaceful. Each position points, however, to the same conclusion - the failure of the old boat. The touch of reality dissolves the dream of romance, and the impact of the new sensation-seeking[1] elegant cult of town shatters the old, settled family fabric of the country. The seeds of this invading destructive force are

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1. David Copperfield, Chapter XXI: "A most engaging little beauty!" said Steerforth, taking my arm. "Well! It's a quaint place, and they are quaint company, and it's quite a new sensation to m ix with them."

already there in Em'ly's dislike of the hard life Mr. Peggotty and Ham lead and in her desire to relieve it by becoming a 'lady'. And thus the old boat may well be an unsuccessful emissary of the sea to 'dry land', a pattern of old values shattering in the new times, for thus alone can it be 'gone down' in Chapter XXXII as well as 'blown down' in Chapter LV.

There appears to be another strand of 'romance' woven into the story, that of the doll-like Dora, and it is destined to disintegrate as surely. Perhaps David's own mother, 'the baby' in Miss Betsey Trotwood's words, is the first illustration of how romance fades out before reality - of the Murdstones in her case. Again, is not David himself with 'an undisciplined heart' torn equally between the Peggottys and the Steerforths? And could not the whole novel be described as a conflict between romance and reality - visions of romance powerfully raised up by Dickens only to fight a losing battle against the hard realities of his early life. Perhaps this can also account for the this-worldliness of the work hinted at earlier.

The sea directly and the river indirectly are both connected with the old boat. As already suggested, in their development as symbols they do not seem to move forward. The river appeals to Martha here as it appealed to 'the dismal man' in Pickwick, or better still to Nancy in Oliver, and its mirroring expanse reflects the character of the human scenes it flows among, as it did in the Curiosity Shop and the Notes. Again, it figures as a symbol of life here as it did in Dombey. But perhaps in one respect Dickens's handling of it here is distinctive. It is executed with rare artistic beauty, and the secret of success appears to lie in the fact that all the three characteristics

mentioned above have been blended together to reveal the despair of a fallen girl, to uphold the moral health of the country life, and to expose the filthy character of town life. The strong consciousness with which the kinship between a defiled life and a dirty stream is emphasized, heightens the emotional tone of the scene, but its too overt presentation seems to detract a little from its mysterious charm, and perhaps its over-all effect is not as great as in Dombey.

But the passage of time, charged as it is with the sweet touch of melancholy, is depicted more poetically in Copperfield than in Dombey. David indulges in one of his retrospects:

> 'Weeks, months, seasons, pass along. They seem little more than a summer day and a winter evening. Now, the Common where I walk with Dora is all in bloom, a field of bright gold; and now the unseen heather lies in mounds and bunches underneath a covering of snow. In a breath, the river that flows through our Sunday walks is sparkling in the summer sun, is ruffled by the winter wind, or thickened with drifting heaps of ice. Faster than ever river ran towards the sea, it flashes, darkens, and rolls away.' (DC, Ch. XLVIII)

The description of the tempest appears to recall Chuzzlewit.[1] The images used there for the rising and falling waves were mountains and caves, and here they are hills and valleys:

> 'Undulating hills were changed to valleys, undulating valleys...were lifted up to hills;...'

Ham is battling against the storm to save Steerforth:

> '...rising with the hills, falling with the valleys, lost beneath the foam;...
>
> '...rising with the hills, falling with the valleys, lost beneath the rugged foam, borne in towards the shore, borne on towards the ship, striving hard and valiantly...' (DC, Ch. LV)

The sea in its elemental fury appears to be a monstrous challenge to life, but it is the doer of justice to the villain and the bringer

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1. Chapter XV.

of peace to the hero. And it is ever gathering in its immense reconciling lap the loves and hates of men, and opening through its calm mysterious depths the way to eternal harmony.

The opening paragraph of 'Nobody's Story' published in Household Words in 1853 is strikingly suggestive and clearly partakes of the allegorical tone of this exquisite little piece:

> 'He lived on the bank of a mighty river, broad and deep, which was always silently rolling on to a vast undiscovered ocean. It had rolled on, ever since the world began. It had changed its course sometimes, and turned into new channels, leaving its old ways dry and barren; but it had ever been on the flow, and ever was to flow until Time should be no more. Against its strong, unfathomable stream, nothing made head. No living creature, no flower, no leaf, no particle of animate or inanimate existence, ever strayed back from the undiscovered ocean. The tide of the river set resistlessly towards it; and the tide never stopped, any more than the earth stops in its circling round the sun.'

And the closing sentences only confirm the universal significance of the river and ocean images:

> 'The story of Nobody is the story of the rank and file of the earth. They bear their share of the battle; they have their part in the victory; they fall; they leave no name but in the mass. The march of the proudest of us, leads to the dusty way by which they go...'

In Bleak House the river is an important member of the great image-gallery of the fog symbol:

> 'Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and green meadows, fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city...' (BH, Ch. I)

However, more important is the appearance of the river in connexion with the search for Lady Dedlock. Esther accompanies the party headed by Mr. Bucket. A bill, 'Found Drowned', startles her in

the 'low-lying, water-side, dense neighbourhood of narrow thoroughfares':

> 'The river had a fearful look, so overcast and secret, creeping away so fast between the low flat lines of shore: so heavy with indistinct and awful shapes, both of substance and shadow: so deathlike and mysterious.' (BH, Ch. LVII)

This not only recalls the riverside accounts in Copperfield and the earlier books, but it also points forward to similar scenes in Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend. Incidentally, Dickens is also exploiting his direct knowledge of the activities of the Thames police.

Another division of water, namely, the rain, adds to the symbolic intent of stagnation and decay around the Chesney Wold of nobility, as around the Chancery of society:

> 'The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground, for half a mile in breadth, is a stagnant river, with melancholy trees for islands in it, and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain... The view from my Lady Dedlock's own windows is alternately a lead-coloured view, and a view in Indian ink. The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day; and the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called, from old time, the Ghost's Walk, all night...' (BH, Ch. II)

The river and rain images here bear a deeper meaning and produce an intenser effect. The spoiling influence of water - traced earlier in the Pictures - forms the spirit of the artistic design.

In the tight mould of Hard Times the river appears only for a moment or two but effectively enough. In it is figured the whole character of Coketown which in itself symbolizes the growing industrial activity of the times:

> 'It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye,...' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. V)

> 'Down upon the river that was black and thick with dye, some Coketown boys who were at large - a rare sight there - rowed a crazy boat, which made a spumous track upon the water as it jogged along, while every dip of an oar stirred up vile smells...' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. I)

Such a river is the fittest 'bed' for a foul 'whelp'. The following marks the conclusion of the scene in which Tom discloses to Harthouse that he had exploited Louisa's affection for his own selfish ends, wishing her to marry old Bounderby:

> 'The whelp went home, and went to bed. If he had had any sense of what he had done that night, and had been less of a whelp and more of a brother, he might have turned short on the road, might have gone down to the ill-smelling river that was dyed black, might have gone to bed in it for good and all, and have curtained his head for ever with its filthy waters.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. III)

Dickens wishes here for Tom what he has earlier awarded to Quilp in the Curiosity Shop and to the drunkard in the Sketches.

But the approaching death of Mrs. Gradgrind is depicted in a tone of Dombey, as it were:

> 'Left alone with her mother, Louisa saw her lying with an awful lull upon her face, like one who was floating away upon some great water, all resistance over, content to be carried down the stream...' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. IX)

Dorrit marks a very important stage in the development of the river image as a great Dickensian symbol. Not only does it here confirm its old associations with the life of man much more powerfully; it also reveals an astonishing capacity for recording the melancholy yearning tones of a lover's sensibility. It appears to revolve primarily round the characters of Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam, and perhaps it can best be studied in their light.

This sums up the life and history of the Child of the Marshalsea 'at twenty-two':

> 'Worldly wise in hard and poor necessities, she was innocent in all things else. Innocent, in the mist through which she saw her father, and the prison, and the turbid living river that flowed through it and flowed on.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. VII)

But that is only her one vision, vague and confused and metaphorically conceived. She also feels open air and sees free light:

> "To see the river, and so much sky, and so many objects, and such change and motion. Then to go back, you know, and find him in the same cramped place." (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XXII)

This sense of contrast descends deeper into her consciousness, and even long after the prison wall is 'gone', the conflict lives on. She is looking from above the Grand Canal:

> 'She would think of that old gate, and of herself sitting at it in the dead of the night, pillowing Maggy's head; and of other places and of other scenes associated with those different times. And then she would lean upon her balcony, and look over at the water, as though they all lay underneath it. When she got to that, she would musingly watch its running, as if, in general vision, it might run dry, and show her the prison again, and herself and the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. III)

In Copperfield water-gazing gives Martha a cruel insight into her fallen self; here it restores to Amy her long patiently-borne past quickened into momentary reality. The mystery of the element can permute and combine itself in endless ways.

Dickens's handling of the emotional problem of Arthur Clennam is a phenomenal achievement, and it is interesting that its artistic excellence is based primarily on the river image.

Daniel Doyce is conducting Arthur Clennam for the first time to the Meagleses' cottage-residence at Twickenham. After describing it in terms of Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, Pet, and Tattycoram, Dickens writes:

> 'Within view was the peaceful river and the ferry-boat, to moralise to all the inmates, saying: Young or old, passionate or tranquil, chafing or content, you, thus runs the current always.

> Let the heart swell into what discord it will, thus plays the rippling water on the prow of the ferry-boat ever the same tune. Year after year, so much allowance for the drifting of the boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet, upon this road that steadily runs away; while you, upon your flowing road of time, are so conscious and distracted.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XVI)

The extract quoted above, from Chapter XVI entitled 'Nobody's Weakness', does reflect the coming trials of Clennam's heart.

It seems worth while to cast a glance at the end of the chapter. Clennam is sitting before his fire and making 'up his mind that he is glad he has resolved not to fall in love with Pet'. But he likes to imagine a revised version of himself pushed back twenty years to be worthy to meet the present exigency of seeking Pet's affections. And then -

> 'He softly opened his window, and looked out upon the river. Year after year so much allowance for the drifting of the ferry-boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet.
>
> 'Why should he be vexed or sore at heart? It was not his weakness that he had imagined. It was nobody's, nobody's within his knowledge, why should it trouble him? And yet it did trouble him. And he thought - who has not thought for a moment, sometimes - that it might be better to flow away monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensibility to happiness with its insensibility to pain.' (Ibid.)

The middle-aged bachelor <u>has</u> fallen in love.

Chapter XVII is 'Nobody's Rival' and shows Arthur Clennam at the dinner table with the Gowans and the Barnacles. In the concluding paragraphs there appears the rain making the atmosphere heavy and dreary -

> 'The rain fell heavily on the roof, and pattered on the ground, and dripped among the evergreens, and the leafless branches of the trees. The rain fell heavily, drearily. It was a night of tears.
>
> 'If Clennam had not decided against falling in love with

> Pet; if he had had the weakness to do it; if he had, little by little, persuaded himself to set all the earnestness of his nature, all the might of his hope, and all the wealth of his matured character, on the cast; if he had done this and found that all was lost; he would have been, that night, unutterably miserable. As it was -
>
> 'As it was, the rain fell heavily, drearily.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XVII)

The middle-aged lover is 'unutterably miserable'. He has seen a handsome, well-connected, youthful artist in the field - a rival who must win.

Dickens is envisaging an emotional shift: in place of Pet, Little Dorrit is to be gradually planted in Arthur Clennam's affections. The problem is not easy to solve, and Chapter XXII is aptly called 'A Puzzle', and its close carries the seeds of solution.

Arthur happens to come upon Little Dorrit near the river, and there appears Maggy charged with a secret mission by the elder Dorrit as well as the younger. Arthur deals with the letters differently, accepting the father's request but rejecting the son's I.O.U. Little Dorrit grasps the situation and looks extremely distracted and takes leave of him. He turns 'his face towards the water' and stands thinking:

> 'She would have been distressed at any time by this discovery of the letters; but so much so, and in that unrestrainable way?
>
> 'No.
>
> 'When she had seen her father begging with his threadbare disguise on, when she had entreated him not to give her father money, she had been distressed, but not like this. Something had made her keenly and additionally sensitive just now. Now, was there some one in the hopeless unattainable distance? Or had the suspicion been brought into his mind, by his own associations of the troubled river running beneath the bridge with the same river higher up, its changeless tune upon the prow of the ferry-boat, so many miles an hour the peaceful flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet?' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XXII)

It is wonderful indeed that the emotional change is coming through the same image and in the same psychologically conceived, conscious, self-questioning mode. Does the river then symbolize the continuous flow of human affections so capable of shift in tone and shade?

With Chapter XXVIII, 'Nobody's Disappearance', the transitional phase is complete. Arthur is passing through the meadows by the riverside near the cottage:

> 'He had that sense of peace, and of being lightened of a weight of care, which country quiet awakens in the breasts of dwellers in towns. Everything within his view was lovely and placid. The rich foliage of the trees, the luxuriant grass diversified with wild flowers, the little green islands in the river, the beds of rushes, the water-lilies floating on the surface of the stream, the distant voices in boats borne musically towards him on the ripple of the water and the evening air, were all expressive of rest...' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XXVIII)

On this scene appears Pet to tell him how happy she will be with Henry Gowan. She offers him roses, begs him to forgive her if he has anything to forgive, and bids him good-bye. Later, Mr. Meagles in his talk with him remembers Pet's dead twin sister and imagines that Arthur might have loved her if she had lived. And yet later -

> 'When he had walked on the river's bank in the peaceful moonlight for some half-an-hour, he put his hand in his breast and tenderly took out the handful of roses. Perhaps he put them to his heart, perhaps he put them to his lips, but certainly he bent down on the shore, and gently touched them on the flowing river. Pale and unreal in the moonlight, the river floated them away.
>
> 'The lights were bright within doors when he entered, and the faces on which they shone, his own face not excepted, were soon quietly cheerful. They talked of many subjects...and so to bed, and to sleep. While the flowers, pale and unreal in the moonlight, floated away upon the river; and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas.' (Ibid.)

By launching the roses where he does, Arthur Clennam gives his hopeless passion a burial in the same river that had first addressed

him only as one of mankind and then followed his heart's fortunes through all vicissitudes. It can perhaps be urged that the charming web of melancholy woven here owes its magic solely to the river symbol with its attendant images. Probably it can also be asserted, and with equal emphasis, that very conscious labour went into the creation of this superb artistic pattern. In fact the sweet lingering pain throughout accompanying this love episode is in tune with that calm mood of resignation in which Dickens conceived Dorrit as a whole and which persists till its very end:

> 'They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XXXIV)

Before discussing how the sea and the river appear in A Tale of Two Cities it is perhaps better to study how another division of water, the fountain, figures there. It seems to be the most powerful and elaborately created - and to all appearance unnoticed till now - of the symbols in the novel, and it is interesting to see how Dickens has developed it to carry the maximum possible intent.

The Marquis is in town:

> 'At last, swooping at a street corner by a fountain, one of its wheels came to a sickening little jolt, and there was a loud cry from a number of voices, and the horses reared and plunged.'

> 'On seeing him, the miserable creature fell upon his shoulder, sobbing and crying, and pointing to the fountain, where some women were stooping over the motionless bundle, and moving gently about it. They were as silent, however, as the men.'

> 'The father had long ago taken up his bundle and hidden himself away with it, when the women who had tended the bundle while it lay on the base of the fountain, sat there watching the running of the water and the rolling of the Fancy Ball - when the

one woman who had stood conspicuous, knitting, still knitted on with the steadfastness of Fate. The water of the fountain ran, the swift river ran, the day ran into evening, so much life in the city ran into death according to rule, time and tide waited for no man, the rats were sleeping close together in their dark holes again, the Fancy Ball was lighted up at supper, all things ran their course.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. VII)

The Marquis is in the country:

'All its people were poor, and many of them were sitting at their doors, shredding spare onions and the like for supper, while many were at the fountain, washing leaves, and grasses, and any such small yieldings of the earth that could be eaten.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. VIII)

The Marquis is at 'The Gorgon's Head', and it is night:

'Other sound than the owl's voice there was none, save the falling of a fountain into its stone basin; for, it was one of those dark nights that hold their breath by the hour together, and then heave a long low sigh, and hold their breath again.'

'He moved from end to end of his voluptuous bedroom, looking again at the scraps of the day's journey that came unbidden into his mind; the slow toil up the hill at sunset, the setting sun, the descent, the mill, the prison on the crag, the little village in the hollow, the peasants at the fountain, and the mender of roads with his blue cap pointing at the chain under the carriage. That fountain suggested the Paris fountain, the little bundle lying on the step, the women bending over it, and the tall man with his arms up, crying, "Dead!"'

'The fountain in the village flowed unseen and unheard, and the fountain at the chateau dropped unseen and unheard - both melting away, like the minutes that were falling from the spring of Time - through three dark hours. Then, the grey water of both began to be ghostly in the light, and the eyes of the stone faces of the chateau were opened.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. IX)

Gaspard is hanged:

'...and in the evening, when the work of the day is achieved and it assembles to gossip at the fountain, all faces are turned towards the prison... They whisper at the fountain, that although condemned to death he will not be executed... Again; on the other hand, they whisper at the fountain,...that he is brought down into our country to be executed on the spot, and that he will very certainly be executed... One old man says at the fountain...'

'Well! Some whisper this, some whisper that; they speak of nothing else; even the fountain appears to fall to that tune.

> At length, on Sunday night when all the village is asleep, come soldiers, winding down from the prison, and their guns ring on the stones of the little street. Workmen dig, workmen hammer, soldiers laugh and sing; in the morning, by the fountain, there is raised a gallows forty feet high, poisoning the water.'
>
> 'On the top of the gallows is fixed the knife, blade upwards, with its point in the air. He is hanged there forty feet high - and is left hanging, poisoning the water.'
>
> 'It is frightful, messieurs. How can the women and children draw water! Who can gossip of an evening, under that shadow! Under it, have I said? When I left the village, Monday evening as the sun was going to bed, and looked back from the hill, the shadow struck across the church, across the mill, across the prison - seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to where the sky rests upon it!' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. XV)

The words, 'That fountain suggested the Paris fountain', clearly reveal that Dickens was fully conscious of the effects he was trying to create.

The fountain running its course like time is a natural meeting place for the people. It is a symbol of life, and it beautifully depicts its purity and spontaneity and continuity. Through it Dickens has connected town with the country, and the child's death by crushing before it and the father's by hanging above it, are superb touches of symbolic art. When the Colossus of a gallows vitiates a fountain, it can only stand astride over the dark dominions of death. It may also be pointed out that it is again the fountain symbol which gives momentum to the plans of the Defarges and 'Jacques Five'. Round it are centred tyrant-Aristocracy, crushed Commonalty and red-eyed Jacquerie, and hence it may be regarded as the key-symbol of the Tale.

In his frequent sojourns in France Dickens most probably saw the beautiful Medici fountain in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris and 'Fountain of the Innocents', the earliest ornamental fountain erected there. Perhaps he also saw the famous group of fountains at

Versailles and many other fountains in private villas and chateaux. But there is definite evidence of his interest in the fountain in general. In the Pictures, for instance, one comes across such significant references as these:

'...adorned with statues, vases, fountains, marble basins,...'

'The garden near at hand, among the roofs and houses: all red with roses and fresh with little fountains: is the Acqua Sola...'

'...also the market-place, or great Piazza, which is a large square, with a great broken-nosed fountain in it.'

'We had passed through Montefiaschone (famous for its wine) and Viterbo (for its fountains).'

'The beauty of the Piazza, on which it stands, with its clusters of exquisite columns, and its gushing fountains - so fresh, so broad, and free, and beautiful - nothing can exaggerate...'

'Crossing from these patches of thick darkness, out into the moon once more, the fountain of Trevi, welling from a hundred jets, and rolling over mimic rocks, is silvery to the eye and ear.'

'In the midst of the city - in the Piazza of the Grand Duke, adorned with beautiful statues and the Fountains of Neptune - rises the Palazzo Vecchio...'

With this actual observation of the fountain and with its old emblematic meaning Dickens's genius had every reason to make of it what he did make in the Tale.

The sea figures in the Tale only as a sustained metaphor, designed to depict mob scenes especially.[1]

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1. The qualities of turbulence and mysteriousness had already connected the sea and the mob in Barnaby Rudge, Ch. LII: 'A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly in a large city. Where it comes from or whither it goes, few men can tell. Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is as difficult to follow to its various sources as the sea itself; nor does the parallel stop here, for the ocean is not more fickle, and uncertain, more terrible when roused, more unreasonable, or more cruel.'

'With a roar that sounded as if all the breath in France had been shaped into the detested word, the living sea rose, wave on wave, depth on depth, and overflowed the city to that point. Alarm-bells ringing, drums beating, the sea raging and thundering on its new beach, the attack began.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. XXI)

'The swinging sentinel was posted, and the sea rushed on.

'The sea of black and threatening waters, and of destructive upheaving of wave against wave, whose depths were yet unfathomed and whose forces were yet unknown. The remorseless sea of turbulently swaying shapes, voices of vengeance, and faces hardened in the furnaces of suffering until the touch of pity could make no mark on them.' (Ibid.)

It is, however, altogether different with the river image which appears in a highly symbolic role. It is connected with a character occupying a pivotal position in the book and caught at a most critical moment of its life.

Sydney Carton is about to take his most momentous decision. His memory is haunted by, and his spirit steeped in, the solemn words, read years before at his father's grave: "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." Dawn is approaching and he is on the Seine:

'Now, that the streets were quiet, and the night wore on, the words were in the echoes of his feet, and were in the air. Perfectly calm and steady, he sometimes repeated them to himself as he walked; but, he heard them always.

'The night wore out, and, as he stood upon the bridge listening to the water as it splashed the river-walls of the Island of Paris, where the picturesque confusion of houses and cathedral shone bright in the light of the moon, the day came coldly, looking like a dead face out of the sky. Then, the night, with the moon and the stars, turned pale and died, and for a little while it seemed as if Creation were delivered over to Death's dominion.

'But, the glorious sun, rising, seemed to strike those words, that burden of the night, straight and warm to his heart in its long bright rays. And looking along them, with reverently shaded

> eyes, a bridge of light appeared to span the air between him and the sun, while the river sparkled under it.
>
> 'The strong tide, so swift, so deep, and certain, was like a congenial friend, in the morning stillness. He walked by the stream, far from the houses, and in the light and warmth of the sun fell asleep on the bank. When he awoke and was afoot again, he lingered there yet a little longer, watching an eddy that turned and turned purposeless, until the stream absorbed it, and carried it on to the sea. - "Like me!"
>
> 'A trading-boat, with a sail of the softened colour of a dead leaf, then glided into his view, floated by him, and died away. As its silent track in the water disappeared, the prayer that had broken up out of his heart for a merciful consideration of all his poor blindnesses and errors, ended in the words, "I am the resurrection and the life."' (TTC, Bk. III, Ch. IX)

At this moment Sydney Carton's consciousness acquires that strategic point of view which is born of faith, and which holds the key to the eternal mysteries of life and death. It is raised to such a pitch at the time of daybreak which, 'with light and warmth' issuing out of darkness and cold, forms a link between 'Creation' and 'Death'. Not only is the spiritual crisis depicted in these temporal colours; it is also figured in physical images. The bridge symbolizes the observation post of the soul, the eddy in the stream suggests its individual entity in its present state of ferment, and the river flowing with it to the sea signifies life heading towards eternity. But in this exquisitely wrought pattern the bridge across the Seine, providing for water-gazing, forms the central point, and perhaps it is not too much to say that although the whole great scene is a rare blend of various effects, it has been conceived and executed primarily in terms of the river image.

Water appears in a slightly different way in 'A Message from the Sea' published in 1860 and written in collaboration with Wilkie Collins.

The reference here will be limited only to Chapters I and III which Dickens wrote.

This Christmas story has the beautiful setting of a village in North Devonshire which, Captain Jorgan thinks, is "a mighty sing'lar and pretty place", and which is "built sheer up the face of a steep and lofty cliff" standing on the sea-beach. But not *until* the action moves to 'A Cornish Moor' in Chapter III does the description become somewhat suggestive. It seems to be a very late result of that haunting effect which Cornwall had on his imagination.[1]

Dickens describes the outskirts of Lanrean where Captain Jorgan and Alfred Raybrock hope to find Mr. Parvis and make amends for the lapse of the late old Raybrock:

> '"I'd have liked to have had a look at this place too," said the captain. "When there was a monstrous sweep of water rolling over it, dragging the powerful great stones along and piling 'em atop of one another, and depositing the foundations for all manner of superstitions. Bless you! the old priests, smart mechanical critturs as they were, never piled up many of those stones. Water's the lever that moved 'em. When you see 'em thick and blunt tewwards one point of the compass, and fined away thin tewwards the opposite point, you may be as good as moral sure that the name of the ancient Druid that fixed 'em was Water."
>
> 'The captain referred to some great blocks of stone presenting this characteristic, which were wonderfully balanced and heaped on one another, on a desolate hill. Looking back at these, as they stood out against the lurid glare of the west, just then expiring, they were not unlike enormous antediluvian birds, that had perched there on crags and peaks, and had been petrified there.
>
> '"But it's an interesting country," said the captain, - "fact! It's old in the annals of that said old Arch Druid, Water, and it's old in the annals of the said old parson-critturs too..."' ('A Message from the Sea', Ch. III)

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1. Letters, I, pp. 485 and 497. Dickens's interest in 'the very dreariest and most desolate portion of the sea-coast of Cornwall' is visible and exceptional.

That sounds half-geological, half-mythical. It is something new. The almost archaeological niceties here may be due to the detective method of Wilkie Collins - the influence of which is perhaps more manifest later in Edwin Drood - or it is only a recrudescence of the antiquarian pretensions which are clear in Chapter XI of Pickwick. The classical[1] touch makes a good blend with it although as a rule Dickens has not appreciably exploited mythological resources. Perhaps he would have been as successful in this regard as James Joyce, only if he had liked to try. For, whenever he makes a mythical reference, he invariably heightens the symbolic effect of the larger pattern as, for instance, through the image of 'The Gorgon's Head' in the Tale, or even through the figure of the Roman, pointing from the ceiling, in Mr. Tulkinghorn's room in Bleak House.

> 'Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea.'

That's how Pip speaks in the opening paragraphs of Great Expectations and this setting - with the mist overhanging - forms the background of a large part of the action in the book. The Battery where Pip helps Magwitch with meals and a file, is of a piece with it, and so is the spot from where 'Hulks' are dimly visible. The figures of Joe and Orlick too move in the same atmosphere. Then about the middle of the story the river appears as training ground for the boating skill of Pip's friends, Herbert and Startop. However, the

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1. Also in Pickwick, Chapter II: Jingle is caught in a heroic key - "Epic poem - ten thousand lines - revolution of July - composed it on the spot - Mars by day, Apollo by night, - bang the field-piece, twang the lyre."

suggestive quality of its description strikes a deeper note when Magwitch's escape across the Channel is being manoeuvered.

Pip is convalescing after he has been rescued from the fatal grip of Orlick:

> 'Wednesday morning was dawning when I looked out of window. The winking lights upon the bridges were already pale, the coming sun was like a marsh of fire on the horizon. The river, still dark and mysterious, was spanned by bridges that were turning coldly grey, with here and there at top a warm touch from the burning in the sky. As I looked along the clustered roofs, with church towers and spires shooting into the unusually clear air, the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me, too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well.' (GE, Ch. LIII)

This tone of hope and cheer is sustained while Pip, Herbert, and Startop row to take Magwitch aboard from Mill Pond stairs:

> 'The crisp air, the sunlight, the movement on the river, and the moving river itself - the road that ran with us, seeming to sympathise with us, animate us, and encourage us on - freshened me with new hope...' (GE, Ch. LIV)

But the description does not ignore the obstacles to good cheer:

> 'Among the tiers of shipping, in and out, avoiding rusty chain-cables, frayed hampen hawsers, and bobbing buoys, sinking for the moment floating broken baskets, scattering floating chips of wood and shaving, cleaving floating scum of coal, in and out...' (Ibid.)

And there is a subtle touch of foreboding:

> '"If all goes well," said I, "you will be perfectly free and safe again within a few hours."
>
> '"Well," he returned, drawing a long breath, "I hope so."
>
> '"And think so?"
>
> 'He dipped his hand in the water over the boat's gunwale, and said, smiling with that softened air upon him which was not new to me.
>
> '"Ay, I s'pose I think so, dear boy. We'd be puzzled to be more quiet and easy-going than we are at present. But - it's a flowing so soft and pleasant through the water, p'raps, as

> makes me think it - I was a thinking through my smoke just then, that we can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours, than we can see to the bottom of the river what I catches hold of. Nor yet we can't no more hold their tide than I can hold this. And it's run through my fingers and gone, you see!" holding up his dripping hand.
>
> '"But for your face, I should think you were a little despondent," said I.
>
> '"Not a bit on it, dear boy! It comes of flowing on so quiet, and of that there rippling at the boat's head making a sort of a Sunday tune. Maybe I'm a growing a trifle old besides."' (Ibid.)

The quiet flow of the river brings on a reflective vein and a calm despair, and its opaque depth connotes the inscrutable nature of time. Who would imagine that the suspense of the situation and the tension of the minds could be represented with such philosophic depth just by a dip of the hand in the water over the boat's gunwale. This is indeed great art!

The 'Jack' of the little causeway, 'who was so slimy and smeary as if he had been low water-mark too', and 'who had a bloated pair of shoes on,...that he had taken a few days ago from the feet of a drowned seaman washed ashore', and the 'Jack at the Ship' whose interest in the recovery of the body of the drowned Compeyson seemed to be 'much heightened when he heard that it had stockings on', most probably called forth the full-fledged characters of Gaffer and Riderhood in the next novel. This river setting appears to have taken a stronger hold of Dickens's imagination after he had actually exploited it in Great Expectations, and his extraordinary interest in it found prompt expression.

It is a very big part that water plays in Our Mutual Friend, but except for admitting of a greater social meaning, it reflects the

features already cast. The action seems to be equally shared by the river-banks and the dust-heaps, with the fashionable 'new' world oscillating between. It is significant that there are water-rats as well as dust-rats - Dickens is out to expose man's love of filthy lucre.

Lizzie does not like the river, and Gaffer knows it; but he wants his daughter to see her mistake, because it is their living, their 'meat and drink':

> "How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a baby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore..." (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. I)

However, Lizzie cannot but associate dark and foul deeds with the river.

Miss Abbey discloses to her that she has decided to shut the doors of 'the Fellowships' against her father as against Riderhood:

> 'The night was black and shrill, the riverside wilderness was melancholy... As she came beneath the lowering sky, a sense of being involved in a murky shade of Murder dropped upon her; and, as the tidal swell of the river broke at her feet without her seeing how it gathered, so, her thoughts startled her by rushing out of an unseen void and striking at her heart.
>
> 'Then at the best, the beginning of his being set apart, whispered against, and avoided, was a certain fact. It dated from that very night. And as the great black river with its dreary shores was soon lost to her view in the gloom, so, she stood on the river's brink unable to see into the vast blank misery of a life suspected, and fallen away from by good and bad, but knowing that it lay there dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. VI)

Thus the river can mirror for Lizzie the future troubled course of her father's life till its very end.

Turning to discuss the social implications of the river image as they specially concern Our Mutual Friend, one may observe the terms in which Eugene and Mortimer are described rushing towards Gaffar Hexam's house:

'The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument, and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat...the wheels rolled on...' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. III)

And then they glide on in a boat Riderhood is rowing:

'Not a ship's hull, with its rusty iron links of cable run out of hawse-holes long discoloured with the iron's rusty tears, but seemed to be there with a fell intention. Not a figure-head but had the menacing look of bursting forward to run them down... Not a lumbering black barge, with its cracked and blistered side impending over them, but seemed to suck at the river with a thirst for sucking them under. And everything so vaunted the spoiling influences of water - discoloured copper, rotten wood, honeycombed stone, green dank deposit - that the after-consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XIV)

The old workhouse theme of Oliver comes alive through Betty Higden but gains point and gathers power through the river image:

'In those pleasant little towns on Thames, you may hear the fall of the water over the weirs, or even, in still weather, the rustle of the rushes; and from the bridge you may see the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea. It were too much to pretend that Betty Higden made out such thoughts; no; but she heard the tender river whispering to many like herself, "Come to me, come to me! When the cruel shame and terror you have so long fled from, most beset you, come to me! I am the Relieving Officer appointed by eternal ordinance to do my work; I am not held in estimation according as I shirk it. My breast is softer than the pauper-nurse's; death in my arms is peacefuller than among the pauper-wards. Come to me!"' (OMF, Bk. III, Ch. VIII)

It is not difficult to recognize in the extracts just quoted some of the points discussed earlier. For instance, the pure, innocent course of the river in the country - in Wordsworthian 'childhood' terms first noticed in the Curiosity Shop - and the polluting influence of town on it, are clearly present above. Again, 'the dismal man', Nancy, and Martha are felt near enough. Yet again, the declamatory

tone of the protest over Jo in Bleak House rings in the background. But the spoiling influences of water - recalling the Pictures - have been observed and depicted with a poetic depth, and it is wonderful how 'scum of humanity' has been linked with 'higher grounds'. As in a larger pattern in Bleak House, the physical merges here in the social, and by virtue of a single water image.

Dickens imagines life on the river - in town - in terms of slime and scum and ooze, and generally apportions crime to amphibious creatures. Their very organism springs up from the filthy water. The great scene of Riderhood's recovery after his wherry has been run down by a steamer, is an admirable illustration. He lies at Miss Abbey's, struggling between life and death and slowly regaining consciousness. While his daughter Pleasant 'quite believes that the impassive hand she chafes will revive a tender hand, if it revive ever': 'The low, bad, unimpressible face is coming up from the depths of the river, or what other depths, to the surface again...'

Indirectly an inference can perhaps be drawn that with Dickens the river is a favourite choice as a scene of crime and death. Apart from the other deaths by water, the fatal embrace of Riderhood and Bradley near the Lockhouse is a case in point:

> 'When the two were found, lying under the ooze and scum behind one of the rotting gates, Riderhood's hold had relaxed, probably in falling, and his eyes were staring upward. But he was girdled still with Bradley's iron ring, and the rivets of the iron ring held tight.' (OMF, Bk. IV, Ch. XV)

Significantly enough the scene of Bradley's murderous attack on Eugene is different. The river banks here are green, and the evening atmosphere, with the paper-mill village at hand, beautiful. The impending calamity is anticipated:

> 'The rippling of the river seemed to cause a correspondent stir in his uneasy reflections. He would have laid them asleep if he could, but they were in movement, like the stream, and all tending one way with a strong current. As the ripple under the moon broke unexpectedly now and then, and palely flashed in a new shape and with a new sound, so parts of his thoughts started, unbidden, from the rest, and revealed their wickedness. "Out of the question to marry her," said Eugene, "and out of the question to leave her. The crisis!"' (OMF, Bk. IV, Ch. VI)

Eugene's dubious sincerity is reprehensible, and "The crisis!" is followed by a crash from behind. The rippling of the river here represents the disturbed stream of consciousness, but the over-all effect of this and what follows by way of description is not at all in terms of scum, slime, or ooze. In spite of the suspense in the situation, it has a tone of calm and peace. Perhaps because there is going to be a purge of an otherwise noble nature. Or because the outcome is to be hopeful - Eugene is to be saved. Or again because it is the river in the country. It is also interesting that already Dickens has given Bella and Rokesmith 'a very pleasant walk' on this very charming spot. They have been discussing the sad turn Mr. Boffin's character has taken of late:

> 'The trees were bare of leaves, and the river was bare of water-lilies, but the sky was not bare of its beautiful blue, and the water reflected it, and a delicious wind ran with the stream, touching the surface crisply. Perhaps the old mirror was never yet made by human hands, which, if all the images it had in its time reflected could pass across its surface again, would fail to reveal some scene of horror or distress. But the great serene mirror of the river seemed as if it might have reproduced all it had ever reflected between those placid banks, and brought nothing to the light save what was peaceful, pastoral, and blooming.' (OMF, Bk. III, Ch. IX)

A scene of greater calm and repose could hardly be imagined - a natural, reflecting surface making a choice between what it is to reflect and what not! To make Eugene bleed on the green grass of the river bank - and not amidst slime and ooze - is perhaps to suggest

Eugene's innocence as against Bradley's wickedness as well as to bring into play the noble passion and heroic nature of Lizzie.

Thus although as physical fact the river appears in Our Mutual Friend more prominently than in any other novel, yet somehow its symbolic effect here seems to fall short of what it was in Dombey or Dorrit. The reason is not easy to assign. Perhaps it is the sounding of the social note rather too extravagantly, or it is the comparatively leisurely pattern of its descriptions.

To all appearance the river was designed to take an important role in Edwin Drood. Time and again Dickens leads the reader's attention that way. For instance, there is in Rosa's mind the picture of her dead mother:

> 'The fatal accident had happened at a party of pleasure. Every fold and colour in the pretty summer dress, and even the long wet hair, with scattered petals of ruined flowers still clinging to it, as the dead young figure, in its sad, sad beauty lay upon the bed, were fixed indelibly in Rosa's recollection.' (MED, Ch. IX)

Then there are casual but recurrent references to the river. After his heated difference with Edwin in the presence of Jasper, Neville has some 'wildly passionate ideas of the river'. Mr. Crisparkle has 'his favourite fragment of ruin' to visit which stands 'looking down upon the river', and Helena and Neville Landless have their 'usual walk' along the river. Again Edwin and Rosa decide to be brother and sister instead of husband and wife in their stroll by the river:

> 'The bright frosty day declined as they walked and spoke together. The sun dipped in the river far behind them, and the old city lay red before them, as their walk drew to a close. The moaning water cast its seaweed duskily at their feet, when

> they turned to leave its margin; and the rooks hovered above them with hoarse cries, darker splashes in the darkening air.' (MED, Ch. XIII)

When after Edwin's disappearance the long energetic search for his body in the river has failed, Dickens shifts the scene to Cloisterham Weir. One night Mr. Crisparkle thinks that something unusual hangs about the place, and the following morning he recovers from the interstices of the timbers a gold watch with 'E.D.' engraved upon its back and a shirt-pin sticking 'in some mud and ooze'.

Even later the river figures in the book. Mr. Tartar leads Rosa and Mr. Grewgious from Furnival's Inn to a boating excursion - recalling perhaps the water-parties and holiday-making in the Sketches.

It appears that Dickens was planning to connect Cloisterham Weir with the crime. Perhaps it was to be a continuation of Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock in Our Mutual Friend.

Before arriving at certain general conclusions it is perhaps advisable to know what interest, if any, Dickens's contemporaries, or even successors, evinced in the river or the sea as a literary idea. To begin with, there appears to be more of interest in it across the Atlantic than at home. And this is not only in the matter of subject, but also with regard to attitude. It will not be relevant for the purposes of this study to see how Poe came to influence the course of the symbolist movement in France, or to know how Hawthorne's or Melville's work stood in the context of American symbolism, but it may be interesting to enquire how the water images function in their writings.

The narrator in MS. found in a Bottle knows his 'deficiency of

imagination' and has 'a mind to which the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity'. Impelled by 'a kind of nervous restlessness' which haunts him 'as a fiend', he goes on a voyage. In a terrific storm his ship collides with another and founders when, as an inevitable result of this, he is hurled with irresistible violence, upon the rigging of the stranger whose crew do not pay any manner of attention to him. He unwittingly daubs the studding-sail with a tar-brush to form the word DISCOVERY, and this is what he says about the horrible strange cruise:

> "The ship and all in it are imbued with the spirit of Eld. The crew glide to and fro like the ghosts of buried centuries..."
>
> "All in the immediate vicinity of the ship, is the blackness of eternal night, and a chaos of foamless water; but, about a league on either side of us, may be seen, indistinctly and at intervals, stupendous ramparts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky, and looking like the walls of the universe..."
>
> "It is evident that we are hurrying onward to some exciting knowledge - some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction."
>
> "Oh, horror upon horror! - the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance. But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny! The circles rapidly grow small - we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool - and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and a thundering of ocean and tempest, the ship is quivering - oh God! and - going down!"

If the words 'deficiency of imagination' and 'a mind to which the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity', do not merely want the reader to give credence to this strange tale, then Poe's problem here was the same as Dickens's later was to be in Hard Times, for the complaint could be easily diagnosed as a type of Gradgrindery. The voyage of the ship with its quaint old crew

symbolizes the world-old course of human endeavour in pursuit of knowledge, and its horrible destruction represents the ultimate failure of the mad quest of DISCOVERY. The blackness signifies the inscrutable mystery of life, and the ramparts of ice suggest the limits of human reason and, of course, the ocean stands for total extinction. Does it follow then that it is by exercising his powers of fancy and imagination that man can live in health and peace? The solution, as well as the problem, may be in Dickens's own line, but what a difference between his world of everyday life and ordinary experience and Poe's world of pure abstraction and rare romance. The former sounds like one's own heartbeats, the latter like a far cry!

Hawthorne's method springs up from that 'neutral territory between the real world and the fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other'. This basis can perhaps give rise to more than one literary theory, but in his case it takes the form of allegory. For him experience does not exist in its own right, and it can only live in constant subservience to a super-imposed meaning. This appears to give his work an air of regimentation rather than a sense of natural organism. The images lack movement, for they are cast rather than created. The brook in <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> is perhaps an apt illustration.

Hester Prynne is waiting for Arthur Dimmesdale in the forest, and Pearl is with her. There flows 'over a bed of fallen and drowned leaves' a small brook, and lest, with its 'never-ceasing loquacity', it should 'whisper tales out of the heart of the old forest', the

'giant trees and boulders of granite seemed intent on making a mystery' of its course:

> 'Continually, indeed, as it stole onward, the streamlet kept a babble, kind, quiet, soothing, but melancholy, like the voice of a young child that was spending its infancy without playfulness, and knew how to be merry among sad acquaintance and events of sombre hue.'
>
> '"Oh, brook! Oh, foolish and tiresome little brook!" cried Pearl, after a while to its talk. "Why art thou so sad? Pluck up a spirit, and do not be all the time sighing and murmuring!"
>
> 'But the brook, in the course of its little lifetime among the forest trees, had gone through so solemn an experience that it could not help talking about it and seemed to have nothing else to say. Pearl resembled the brook, inasmuch as the current of her life gushed from a well-spring as mysterious, and had flowed through scenes shadowed as heavily through gloom. But unlike the little stream, she danced and sparkled, and prattled airily along her course.'

Arthur Dimmesdale appears on the scene, and the child is sent away to play while he and Hester talk in confidence. He continues to suffer in private and she in public for the sin that gave birth to Pearl and darkened for ever the lives of all the three.

They decide on a plan of flight, and Hester throws away the symbol of her shame, the scarlet letter A. They now want Pearl to join them again, but the child stands bewildered, staring at them from the other side of the brook:

> 'It was strange, the way in which Pearl stood, looking so steadfastly at them through the dim medium of the forest gloom, herself, meanwhile, all glorified with a ray of sunshine, that was attracted thitherward by a certain sympathy. In the brook beneath stood another child - another and the same - with likewise its ray of golden light...'
>
> '"I have a strange fancy," observed the sensitive minister, "that this brook is the boundary between two worlds, and that thou canst never meet thy Pearl again..."'

It is not difficult to see how Hawthorne has tried to ensure the efficacy of the brook image by adding words of explanation here and

there. Does it betray the weakness of the allegory or does it express the earnestness of the allegorist? Perhaps it does both. But far different is the effect of a symbolic pattern; its constituents enjoy a much greater freedom, because revealing as they move, they dispense with the need for comment. One is only to think of the river in Dombey and Dorrit! It seems to be a case of artifice against art.

The meaning of the allegory is that when man does evil, there is only one healthy way for him to follow - to make public confession of private sin. Thus alone does Dimmesdale come to gain strength from weakness. But this recovery has not been staged without loss - Roger Chillingworth has plagued his own soul through black revenge. His wife begs him to forgive the unfortunate minister, and he says:

> "Peace, Hester, - peace!...it is not granted me to pardon. I have no such power as thou tellest me of. My old faith, long forgotten, comes back to me, and explains all that we do, and all we suffer. By thy first step awry, thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment it has all been a dark necessity. Ye that have wronged me are not sinful, save in a kind of typical illusion; neither am I fiend-like, who have snatched a fiend's office from his hands. It is our fate. Let the black flower blossom as it may!..."

It is to be seen how through a similar theme of revenge Herman Melville searches for a similar balance of fatalism. Of course, the world he moves in, and the level he works at, are entirely different from Hawthorne's. From the plain adventure tales of Typee and Omoo he entered the realm of allegory in Mardi on the way to symbolism in Moby Dick. It is not possible to bring out here - even in outline - the greatness of this masterpiece, but a few words can perhaps be relevantly said in the context of the water image.

With its Ahab, Elijah, Jonah, and Ishmael and much else, Moby Dick is a sea story rooted deep in the Old Testament, and imbued with the same spirit of daring, fortitude, and challenge that flows from Beowulf to J.M. Synge's Riders to the Sea. In grasp and scope it tends to be encyclopaedic - though not without detriment to itself as a work of art. In regard to setting and style, it breathes of epic grandeur, at times employing even the dramatic form and almost all along acquiring philosophic depth and poetic beauty. Surely Melville knows that he is striving after great ends. He cries for 'a condor's quill' and 'Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand', because to 'produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme...' And the theme that he chooses is 'the mightiest animated mass that has survived the flood; most monstrous and most mountainous'.

But to illustrate a great subject there needs must be a great hero, and Captain Ahab is indeed a very great one. "He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man." He has a birthmark on him from crown to sole "a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish". He has only one leg, Moby Dick having taken the other off, but he has it replaced by a whale-jaw one. This is how he watches for the white whale:

> 'While his one live leg made lively echoes along the deck, every stroke of his dead limb sounded like a coffin-tap. On life and death this old man walked.'

And the amphitheatre, where Moby Dick and Ahab meet, is the sea, the immense expanse beyond 'that turnpike earth':

> 'however baby-man may brag of his science and skill, and however much, in a flattering future, that science and skill may augment; yet for ever and for ever, to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder him, and pulverise the stateliest, stiffest frigate he can make...'

> 'The first boat...floated on an ocean... That same ocean

rolls now; that same ocean destroyed the wrecked ships of last year. Yea, foolish mortals, Noah's flood is not yet subsided; two-thirds of the fair world it yet covers.'

'But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien to it, but it is also a fiend to its own off-spring... Like a savage tigress that tossing in the jungle overlays its own cubs, so the sea dashes even the mightiest whales against the rocks, and leaves them there side by side with the split wrecks of ships. No mercy, no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting like a mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean overruns the globe.'

'Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure... Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began.'

'Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!'

But there are 'times of dreamy quietude' on the sea:

'...when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember, that this velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang.'

And at these moments the sea inspires men of all natures with gentle and generous thoughts.

Stubb is singing a song -

"Such a funny, sporty, gamy, jesty, joky, hoky-poky lad,
is the Ocean, oh!"

Starbuck is heard lowly murmuring:

"Loveliness unfathomable, as ever lover saw in his young bride's eye! - Tell me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe."

And Ahab, "Immortal on land and on sea," does homage too:

"Then hail, for ever hail, O sea, in whose eternal tossings the wild fowl finds his only rest. Born of earth, yet suckled by the sea; though hill and valley mothered me, ye billows are my foster-brothers!"

This mysterious charming power of the element Melville establishes at the very outset. He knows that 'meditation and water are wedded for ever':

'Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.'

At last it is through the sea that Ahab comes to know the secret of his own being and of life itself. In the glad, happy air of 'a clear steel-blue day', he leans over the side of the Pequod, and watches how his shadow in the water sinks and sinks to his gaze, the more and the more that he strives to pierce the profundity. Then from beneath his slouched hat he drops a tear into the sea. Starbuck gently comes up to him, and he opens his heart to him. After forty years of continual whaling on the pitiless sea, he at last feels "deadly faint, bowed, humped" -

"Close! stand close to me Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearthstone! this is the magic glass, man; I see my wife and my child in thine eye."

But Starbuck's passionate entreaties cannot move Ahab. He cannot give up the chase of Moby Dick. Like 'a blighted fruit tree' he shakes and casts his last cindered apple to the soil -

"What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and

> longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time... Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I. By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike."

And again when the second chase fails, and Starbuck appeals to Ahab in Jesus' name to return home, he says:

> "Starbuck, of late I've felt strangely moved to thee; ever since that hour we both saw - thou knowest what, in one another's eyes. But in this matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this hand - a lifeless unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. Look then, underling! that thou obeyest mine..."

One is led to think that through this struggle of man against monster Melville arrives at the same conclusion as Hawthorne does through that of man against man, that is, fatalism and predestination. Ahab and Chillingworth stand on the same ground although at far different levels. Each comes to know himself but not without knowing that he is irrevocably doomed. Does then knowledge mean extinction? Poe's answer is yes - the ship, DISCOVERY, heads irresistibly towards destruction in the horrors of the deep.

Dickens seems to approach the same position subtly in Bleak House through Gridley, Miss Flite, and Rick, and expressly in Dorrit through Mrs. Clennam. But there is one very important difference. Whereas the American scene above is subject to influences of organized thought,[1] Dickens's art draws sustenance - in this respect as in every other -

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1. Aesthetic theory - as contained in The Poetic Principle and The Philosophy of Composition - in the case of Poe, and Puritan mysticism and Calvinistic doctrine in the case of Hawthorne and Melville.

direct from life. Melville moves in a real world, lives on immediate experience, and has wide sympathies,[1] but his world is very specialized, his experience highly individualized, and his sympathies austerely controlled. Whaling is done away from the abodes of men by a handful of men. Dickens is of the land and of the multitude. The mighty theme for him is the common theme.[2] Thus he does not have to go a-voyaging far to stare eternity in the face; he can reveal the mysteries of the element in its land-locked forms, or cast an occasional glance at its calm or fury, standing on its human shores.

Nearer home perhaps the publication of The Mill on the Floss in 1860 is a fact worthy of note. Through the Floss, and its tributary Ripple, appears to flow the very life-blood of the story which opens on 'its green banks' and ends in its furious waters. Nevertheless, F.R. Leavis has to say:

> 'The flooded river has no symbolic or metaphorical value. It is only the dreamed-of perfect accident that gives us the opportunity for the dreamed-of heroic act - the act that shall vindicate us against a harshly misjudging world, bring emotional fulfilment and (in others) changes of heart, and provide a gloriously tragic curtain...'[3]

There is not much room for disagreement, but the position does admit of a few words and in view of the following extracts.

The Floss flows fast:

> 'A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace...'

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1. Moby Dick, Chapter XVII: "I cherish the greatest respect towards everybody's religious obligations, never mind how comical, and could not find it in my heart to undervalue even a congregation of ants worshipping a toadstool."
2. Even poetic subject had been emancipated in England some half a century ago by Wordsworth.
3. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, (1948), pp. 45-6.

The Ripple is living company:

> 'How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving...'

Tom and Maggie love the Dorlcote Mill surroundings:

> 'Tom thought people were at a disadvantage who lived on any other spot of the globe; and Maggie, when she read about Christiana passing "the river over which there is no bridge", always saw the Floss between the green pastures by the Great Ash.'

This allegorical reference is fairly suggestive, and perhaps holds the seed of future developments.

Mrs. Tulliver speaks ominously:

> "They're such children for the water, mine are...they'll be brought in dead and drownded some day. I wish that river was far enough."

Maggie addresses Philip:

> "...but then, you know, the first thing I ever remember in my life is standing with Tom by the side of the Floss, while he held my hand: everything before that is dark to me..."

And she will again be with Tom in the midst of the swollen Floss, and everything will be dark after that.

During her stay with Lucy, Maggie is lost in the charm of her new pleasures, and her future is unpredictable:

> 'Maggie's destiny, then, is at present hidden, and we must wait for it to reveal itself like the course of an unmapped river: we only know that the river is full and rapid, and that for all rivers there is the same final home.'

Perhaps one can see with F.R. Leavis 'the soulful side of Maggie' in the above lines.

The episode of Maggie's elopement with Stephen Guest is almost wholly rendered in terms of the river, mentally and emotionally as well as physically:

> '...he went on rowing idly, half automatically:...they spoke

no word; for what could words have been but an inlet to thought? and thought did not belong to that enchanted haze in which they were enveloped... Maggie was only dimly conscious of the banks, as they passed them...'

"See how the tide is carrying us out - away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us - and trying in vain..."

'Maggie listened - passing from her startled wonderment to the yearning after that belief, that the tide was doing it all - that she might glide along with the swift, silent stream, and not struggle any more...'

'They glided along in this way, both resting in that silence as in a haven, both dreading lest their feelings should be divided again...'

'Every influence tended to lull her into acquiescence: that dreamy gliding in the boat, which had lasted for four hours...'

'Behind all the delicious visions of these last hours, which had flowed over her like a soft stream, and made her entirely passive, there was the dim consciousness that the condition was a transient one... But now nothing was distinct to her: she was being lulled to sleep with that soft stream still flowing over her, with those delicious visions melting and fading like the wondrous aerial land of the west.'

It is not difficult to see the metaphorical touches in George Eliot's handling of the river scenes, but it is strange that in spite of her 'moral seriousness' and 'massive intellect' she could not impart any deeper meaning to them. One only wonders how much Dickens had achieved in that direction long before The Mill on the Floss appeared, and what symbolic capital he would have made out of its river setting and its flood catastrophe.

It is perhaps necessary to see how the water images were employed after Dickens, because his distinction in the matter will thus be more visible. About the turn of the century Joseph Conrad is found writing stories in which the element figures rather prominently, though with what significance is to be judged in the light of his own views. He

wrote to Richard Curle:[1]

> "You know yourself very well that in the body of my work barely one tenth is what may be called sea-stuff, and even of that the bulk, that is Nigger and Mirror, has a very special purpose, which I emphasize in my preface. Of course there are seamen in a good many of my books. That doesn't make them sea stories - I do wish that all those ships of mine were given a rest."

Again he noted on the proof of an article on his voyages which Curle had written: "Do try to keep the damned sea out if you can. My interests are terrestrial, after all."

That sounds like exasperation, but it is definite, and perhaps the line of enquiry can be: How do the water images serve Conrad's terrestrial interests?

The full title of his first work is 'Almayer's Folly, a story of an eastern river'. The great Pantai provides an effective Malayan setting to the tale, suggestive touches attending on it throughout. But perhaps the most significant of them is the one that Conrad gives at the most psychological moment. Taminah, the slave-girl, is telling Almayer the story of Nina's secret love for Dain. He is shocked and in silent rage:

> 'he turned away directly, and his face suddenly lost all expression in a stony stare far away over the river. Ah! the river! His old friend and his old enemy, speaking always with the same voice as he runs from year to year bringing fortune or disappointment, happiness or pain, upon the same varying but unchanged surface of glancing currents and swirling eddies. For many years he had listened to the passionless and soothing murmur that sometimes was the song of hope, at times the song of triumph, of encouragement; more often the whisper of consolation that spoke of better days to come. For so many years! So many years! And now to the accompaniment of that murmur he listened to the slow and painful beating of his heart.'

Conrad appears to depict the river as a conforming background of

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1. Richard Curle: The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, (1928), pp. 41-2.

human emotion. And even the sea is capable of being thus represented. Dain says in a love-scene:

> '"The sea, O Nina, is like a woman's heart."
>
> 'She closed his lips with a sudden kiss, and murmured in a steady voice -
>
> '"But to the men that have no fear, O master of my life, the sea is ever true."'

In The Nigger of the Narcissus the ship very often symbolizes human life:

> 'She had her own future; she was alive with the lives of those beings who trod her decks; like that earth which had given her up to the sea, she had an intolerable load of regrets and hopes. On her lived timid truth and audacious lies; and, like the earth, she was unconscious, fair to see - and condemned by men to an ignoble fate.'

And even after the voyage has ended:

> 'Then on the waters of the forlorn stream drifts a ship - a shadowy ship manned by a crew of Shades. They pass and make a sign, in a shadowy hail. Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives?'

It is, however, through Stein in Lord Jim that Conrad reveals the secret of life. He finds the answer to the question, How to be? -

> "A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns - nicht wahr? No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up..."

That is perhaps Conrad's last word on his terrestrial interests. Men's fate 'hangs over their heads like a cloud charged with thunder', and it is through a sensible adaptation to their dangerous situation that they can live. But what is the constant human motive in this hazardous state? -

> 'To see! To see! - this is the craving of the sailor, as of the rest of blind humanity. To have his path made clear for

him is the aspiration of every human being in our beclouded and tempestuous existence...'

This answer is from The Mirror of the Sea, and the impenetrable mystery and callous faithlessness of the ocean are emphasized time and again:

'He...who, putting his trust in the friendship of the sea, neglects the strength and cunning of his right hand, is a fool! As if it were too great, too mighty for common virtues, the ocean has no compassion, no faith, no law, no memory.'

'And I looked upon the true sea - the sea that plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to death. Nothing can touch the brooding bitterness of its soul. Open to all and faithful to none, it exercises its fascination for the undoing of the best...'

The Mirror is a documentary sort of work, and the above extracts are interesting only because they contain a clear view of the problem the element presents to man. Conrad's solution of it through strength and cunning is very much Daedalian, and therefore akin to James Joyce's. And it is visibly different from Melville's. In fact the difference between Melville and Conrad is the same as between a whaler and a merchantship. Conrad is in the line of Defoe, the resourceful tradesman; he is ever of the land even though aboard a ship in the midst of the seas.

Dickens's interests were perhaps far more terrestrial than Conrad's, but there was also a celestial touch in them, for his earth did aspire to a heaven. Not so Conrad's. He says in 'A Personal Record':

'Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, amongst others, on the idea of Fidelity.'

This idea of fidelity - in the interests of a sort of elegant

personal vanity as in Lord Jim - cannot take men far on the path of humanity; it cannot give them love and faith or inspire them with ideals of self-sacrifice. Thus Conrad's terrestrial interests do not look upwards - as do Dickens's - and that is why the water image in him does not strike the deep eternal note that one hears in Dickens at every step.

Glancing at what has been said earlier, one may find Dickens's handling of the 'perverse' element falling in two stages which are roughly separated by the Notes and the Pictures, and Chuzzlewit, with its more suggestive descriptive passages, and the Christmas Books, with their deeper allegorical shades, may be taken as covering the transitional phase - fully reflecting what comes up to Barnaby Rudge and clearly pointing towards what starts with Dombey.

During the first stage water - in the form of river - appears as an element of peace, capable of soothing melancholy dispositions like the dismal man's and comforting aggrieved hearts like Little Nell's. But that is in the country. In town it holds out a promise of shelter to lost characters like Nancy and visits punishment upon exacting demons like Quilp. It also lends support to secret whisperings as those between Nancy and Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow and seems to connive at dark designs as those of Monks and Mr. and Mrs. Bumble. Above all, it is the tell-tale passer-by - reflecting the life of the places it flows among and so contrasting the beauty of the country and the filth of town as in the Curiosity Shop.

Now the transitional phase. In the Notes the sleep-disturbing muddy course of the Mississippi and the beautiful clear stream of the

Ohio appear to go deeper into Dickens's consciousness, and the ecstatic vision of Niagra elevates his soul to a state of heavenly bliss. In the Chimes he connects water with dream in a disturbed mental context, as he had done earlier in Pickwick. But in the Pictures he links water with dream in a charming fairy-land sense, and he expatiates on its spoiling influences almost philosophically. Perhaps it can be held that the highly imaginative - and allegorical - atmosphere, so thick with vague forms and abstract sounds, especially in the Carol and the Chimes, is to be saturated with the dream-water theme to develop into the powerful symbolism of the waves and the river in Dombey.

In the second stage the water images appear to be completely under the master's control, and they show not only a rare fineness of perception but also a great power of execution. In Dombey they create, in eternal and mysterious tones, the effects of bliss and wrath, and they address both the living and the dying, asleep and awake. In Copperfield they depict a significant clash between romance and reality and the old and the new, and show the spiritual sufferings of erring individuals against an unforgiving social background. In Dorrit the river chiefly strikes a deep reflective note and reveals the contrast between freedom and imprisonment and delineates the rise and fall of emotional strains. In the Tale the fountain serves to bring dramatically together aristocracy, commonalty, and Jacquerie, and the river connects reality with eternity and unfolds to a hopeless, dissolute lover the divine secret of 'the life and the resurrection'. In Great Expectations the river records the subtle moods of a struggling soul when about to appear before its Great Judge.

It also suggests the setting - and perhaps through that partly the theme too - for the next novel. In Our Mutual Friend it sets the whole machinery in action, in town as well as in the country, and it rings with the cry of social misery. In Drood it draws almost every character towards itself and appears to hold the clue to an enigma of crime. Thus temperament and circumstance, innocence and intrigue, peace and violence, love and misery, life and death, all are capable of representation in terms of these elemental symbols.

It is not difficult to see that besides forming a part of the locale in most of the novels, the river and the sea assume a clearly symbolic aspect. The theme, the situation, and the characters, all become inter-revealing parts of the same organic whole. Perhaps the unity of design and impression that Dombey, Copperfield, Dorrit, and the Tale possess, and the over-all sense of the compactness of life that they impart are largely due to a masterly handling of the images of the sea, the river, the old boat and the fountain. In Our Mutual Friend there is more of the river than in any other book, and perhaps it is by virtue of this image that in spite of a certain loosening of texture through Fascination Fledgeby and Venus and Betty Higden and Sloppy the fabric remains fairly firm as a whole. Thus it appears that during the second stage of development there has been a progressive gain. In the more voluminous novels, Dombey, Copperfield, Dorrit, and Our Mutual Friend, the great diversity of detail has been given an artistic unity, and in the Tale the symbolic point has achieved additional sharpness. But the first stage and the transitional phase are no less important for all that: they hold in themselves the seeds of all future growth and blossoming.

It is perhaps evident that Dickens has exploited the river and sea images with far wider application and much greater emphasis than writers like Melville and Conrad whose lives had been so long and firmly linked with them as realities. He does not reveal through them the strength or weakness of a captain and a handful of hard-driven men on board a whaler or a merchantman, from the viewpoint of tragic heroism or vain fidelity. But through these symbols he releases upon men - common men - old and young, in the midst of their everyday existence, visions of eternity, deepening the founts of experience and enriching the perception of immortal truth. The idea of the primal element creates that consciousness which can see the impenetrable mystery of being, beckoning it to itself every hour, every moment.

The attraction that water holds for man is of primeval origin. Classical mythology with its Oceanus, Neptunus and Poseidon is more than eloquent on the point. Again, the cult of the river-gods was common to the Greeks and the Hindus.[1] All life flows from, and depends upon, water; and it has fertilizing and purifying qualities. With this background it is easy to understand its symbolic significance, but it is not so easy to see how its power and mystery as a pointer to eternal truth could be brought to bear upon the humdrum detail of life in Victorian England. Dickens not only attempted it fully, but

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1. Among other rivers the Ganges is sacred to the Hindus. The Brahmputra is a suggestive name, 'Brahma' meaning the great God and 'putra' meaning son. The Nile and the Tiber have also enjoyed a rather similar status. Religious primitivism admitted of casting horses and bulls, even human virgins, into rivers as sacrifices. Water is also connected with religious ritual and with almost all ceremonies concerning birth and death. It has thus time-old associations of eternity.

accomplished it admirably. And perhaps in view of his treatment of the 'perverse' element alone, one might question Charles Feidelson's unqualified verdict on the American and English literary scene of that age:

> 'At a time when English literature was living on the capital of romanticism and increasingly given over to unambiguous narrative and orthodox meditation, American literature had turned toward a new set of problems, growing out of a new method. In the central work of Hawthorne, Whitman, Melville, and Poe, symbolism is at once technique and theme. It is a growing principle: not a static device, but a point of view; not a casual subject, but a pervasive presence in the intellectual landscape.'[1]

2 - 'THEM MOUNDS'

"them Mounds looking down upon us..." - Our Mutual Friend

Dust and mud may be included among the elemental symbols employed by Dickens. Both seem to stimulate his imagination appreciably, but mud appears to outweigh dust and, as will be seen, to provide him with more artistic capital. In common parlance they are similarly couched in idiom, but dust has an additional advantage in its universal associations of creation and mortality. Nevertheless, it is mud that receives Dickens's greater attention. An image or a theme finds favour with him according to his reaction to it rather than for its own sake. How mud came specially to provoke and possess his

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1. Charles Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature, (Chicago, 1953), pp. 42-3.

sensibility will be seen later. Just now it is dust that awaits discussion.

In the Sketches there is the ordinary proverbial use. Dickens notes that the chimney-sweeps no longer have any May-day dancing and charges 'the dustmen with throwing what they ought to clear away, into the eyes of the public'. (SB, 'The First of May')

In Oliver it is the dust of the road that attracts Dickens's observation as the special mark of the country. Noah Claypole and Charlotte have just arrived at the Three Cripples in London when Fagin astonishes them by guessing correctly that they are not of town:

"We have not so much dust as that in London," replied the Jew, pointing from Noah's shoes to those of his companion, and from them to the two bundles. (OT, Ch. XLII)

In these earliest works Dickens does not seem to have recognized the potential significance of the dust image. However, in the Curiosity Shop the metaphorical seems to pass into the symbolic. Before Little Nell's body is lowered into the grave and the funeral note of "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust", is struck, her grandfather is found sitting alone, a picture of desolation:

> 'He, and the failing light and dying fire, the time-worn room, the solitude, the wasted life, and gloom, were all in fellowship. Ashes, and dust, and ruin!' (OCS, Ch. LXXI)

But the suggestive touch has been far deeper and much surer a little earlier. The child and the old man are approaching the Black Country: 'the paths of coal-ash and huts of staring brick, marked the vicinity of some great manufacturing town.' Then before they come upon scenes of social misery, they pass amidst 'mounds of ashes by the wayside', and their path takes them through

'A long suburb of red brick houses, - some with patches of garden-ground, where coal-dust and factory smoke darkened the shrinking leaves, and coarse rank flowers.' (OCS, Ch. XLV)

Machinery stifles Nature here, and the atmosphere of Coketown in Hard Times is clearly anticipated.

From the industrial ash-mounds Dickens moves to the churchyard dust-mounds in Chuzzlewit. Mr. Pecksniff's hypocritical flourish takes the form of metaphor:

"What are we...but coaches? Some of us are slow coaches... some of us are fast coaches. Our passions are the horses: and rampant animals too!...and Virtue is the drag. We start from The Mother's Arms, and we run to The Dust Shovel." (MC, Ch. VIII)

Again, going to call on Mr. Pecksniff at Todgers's, old Martin hesitates to proceed with his intention and, avoiding the house, loiters to and fro in a gleam of sunlight that brightens the little churchyard hard by.

'There may have been, in the presence of these idle heaps of dust among the busiest stir of life, something to increase his wavering.' (MC, Ch. X)

The graves signify death in the midst of life and exercise a chastening influence on the old man, even though momentarily.

In The Battle of Life it is indeed a beautiful dust image which Dickens employs to describe the great globe itself. The old philosopher, Doctor Jeddler, looks upon life as 'a gigantic practical joke' and the earnest young man, Alfred, is trying to lead him Godwards:

"Come, come!...there's a serious grain in this large foolish dust-heap, Doctor. Let us allow to-day, that there is One."

But the Doctor refuses to accept the show as a 'system' because

of its senseless battles fought to win more senseless victories, and to cause churchyards to be 'full of bones, and dust of bones, and chips of cloven skulls'.

As in Oliver, there is a brief reference to the dust of the way in the Pictures:

> 'As we approached Marseilles, the road began to be covered with holiday people. Outside the public-houses were parties smoking, drinking, playing...dancing. But dust, dust, dust, everywhere.' ('Avignon to Genoa')

This impression of dustiness seems to have been strong, for it shows itself again in the description of Marseilles opening Dorrit. The 'universal stare' there reveals, besides much else, 'the staring roads deep in dust' and 'the dusty vines'.

In Dombey the ominous atmosphere around the sick-bed of Mrs. Skewton is rich in suggestive images:

> 'Night after night, the waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery; the dust lies piled upon the shore; the sea-birds soar and hover...'

> 'So Edith's mother lies unmentioned of her dear friends, who are deaf to the waves that are hoarse with repetition of their mystery, and blind to the dust that is piled upon the shore, and to the white arms that are beckoning, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away.' (DS, Ch. XLI)

The dust-piles, as part of the sea-scape here, manifestly suggest the dying woman's pecuniary motives with regard to her daughter and of the material capital she has made out of her marriage with Mr. Dombey. Dust figures here as perhaps the first point on the line to Our Mutual Friend.

In Copperfield the image appears in a far different context. Rosa Dartle, in her wounded pride and jealousy, pours the hot water

of taunt and invective over the ruined Em'ly, and advises her to hide herself 'in some obscure life - or, better still, in some obscure death', for

> "There are doorways and dust-heaps for such deaths, and such despair - find one, and take your flight to Heaven!" (DC, Ch. L)

A girl's lapse from virtue means that she has no claims on life in society, and that she should directly join the refuse. It was this sharp edge of the public attitude towards fallen women which Dickens sought to blunt:

> "I have not the least misgiving about being able to bring people gently to its consideration. You will observe that I am endeavouring to turn their thoughts a little that way, in Copperfield."[1]

The reference to 'dust-heaps' in the brief extract from Copperfield may not be of much intrinsic value, but it raises an important issue in regard to chronology. The quotation is from Chapter L which is the last among those constituting Number XVI, i.e., Chapters XLVII - L, for August 1850, and which Dickens wrote 'during July 1850'.[2] The 'dust-heap' seems to have claimed his attention considerably at this time; for in Household Words of July 13, 1850[3] there appeared a story entitled 'Dust; Ugliness Redeemed'. It is surprising how it foreshadows, in broad hint and fine detail, the essential setting of Our Mutual Friend. The scene of action is 'the great Dust-heap':

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1. Letters from Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, ed. Edgar Johnson (London, 1953), p. 165.
2. Butt and Tillotson, p. 163.
3. Notice may also be taken of the fact that Carlyle's "Hudson's Statue" (No. VII in Latter-Day Pamphlets) was published on 1st July 1850. See Appendix C, 441.

> 'About a quarter of a mile distant, having a long ditch and a broken-down fence as a foreground, there rose against the muddled-grey sky, a huge Dust-heap of a dirty black colour, - being, in fact, one of those immense mounds of cinders, ashes, and other emptyings from dust-holes and bins, which have conferred celebrity on certain suburban neighbourhoods of a great city.'

Dickens gives 'a brief sketch of the different departments of the Searchers and Sorters' as 'soft-ware', 'hard-ware', 'bones', 'rags', etc. Against this background he moves particularly the figures of Peg Dotting, 'a poor old woman with a wooden leg', Gaffer Doubleyear, and Jem Clinker, with 'one shrivelled leg', for there appears to be a whole host of hunters on the Dust-heap. Gaffer is ninety-seven and Peg eighty-three, and they have been on the scene ever since their younger days. Having become legendary themselves, they have created a myth of the Dust-heap. Long ago, Gaffer saw the sun 'had dropped something' on it. He searched for it up and down all over the mounds, and what he could find was 'a bit o' broken glass as had got stuck in the heel of an old shoe'. But his faith in this Victorian London Sinai is unshaken, because 'if ever a man saw anything at all, I saw a bit o' the sun; and I thank God for it'.

Nor is Peg behindhand with her experience. She saw 'a beautiful shining star of a violet colour' on the Dust-heap. She toiled up and down to reach for it and did find it, but when 'I took it to the candle, it had turned into the red shell of a lobsky's head, and its two black eyes looked up at me with a long stare, - and I may say, a strong smell, too'.

And Jem who is 'a sort of great-grandson' of theirs 'by mutual adoption', also believes he once saw there a 'bright consummate flower'.

These bewitching visions of light on the Dust-heap are perhaps designed to reveal the spiritual degeneracy of the times brought about by long-protracted physical need.

The importance of the 'Mounds' in Our Mutual Friend as a field for 'Searchers and Sorters' and as a great asset by way of property[1] is well anticipated in this story. Again, Peg Dotting's wooden leg[2] points forward to Silas Wegg's and old Doubleyear's is here called Gaffer as Hexam later is to be. There is yet another notable point. Jem's find of the day contains a will, and Gaffer and Peg take charge of it. On their way back they rescue a drowning man from the canal, which runs 'at the rear of the Dust-heap', and the will turns out to be his. This appears to promise young Harmon in some slight measure.

It can perhaps be urged that the symbolic dust-piles on the shore in Dombey and some of the accessories employed in 'Dust; Ugliness Redeemed' convincingly look forward to Our Mutual Friend.

Bleak House shows a rare blend of the various shades of meaning attendant on 'dust'. Mr. Tulkinghorn is a repository of the secrets of big families, and therefore his place in Lincoln's Inn Fields is

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1. Besides being accidental sources of value, the ash-heaps were profitable commercially. Dickens wrote in the story under discussion:
   'Their worth, however, varies not only with their magnitude... but with the demand. About the year 1820, the Marylebone Dust-heap produced between four thousand and five thousand pounds. In 1832, St. George's paid Mr. Stapleton five hundred pounds a year, not to leave the Heap standing, but to carry it away. Of course he was only too glad to be paid highly for selling his dust.'
2. In his earliest extant letter, written about 1824, to a schoolboy at Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road, Dickens talks about 'a wooden leg'. See Letters, I, 3. Again, the wooden leg is seen to stalk about in Pickwick, Chapter X, in Chuzzlewit, Chapters IX and XLIX, in Copperfield, Chapter V, and in Dorrit, Book I, Chapter XXIII.

'lofty, gusty, and gloomy':

> 'Plenty of dust comes in at Mr. Tulkinghorn's windows, and plenty more has generated among his furniture and papers. It lies thick everywhere. When a breeze from the country that has lost its way, takes fright, and makes a blind hurry to rush out again, it flings as much dust in the eyes of Allegory as the law - or Mr. Tulkinghorn, one of its trustiest representatives - may scatter, on occasion, in the eyes of the laity.
>
> 'In his lowering magazine of dust, the universal article into which his papers and himself, and all his clients, and all things of earth, animate and inanimate, are resolving, Mr. Tulkinghorn sits at one of the open windows, enjoying a bottle of old port.' (BH, Ch. XXII)

It is not difficult to see that the sense of sepulchral mystery, which pervades the whole description and vitalizes both scene and character in perfect harmony, is created above all through the dust image. The common idiom - to fling dust in one's eyes - employed in the Sketches comes back - but how differently - to make the law and architecture meet in a curious but consummate blend. It appears to support the mystifying atmosphere evoked in the very beginning by the fog image and lowering over the book till the very end. But there is more in that way. The slow-grinding torture that is going on throughout in Chancery, has been powerfully, even philosophically, suggested in terms of 'the universal article', dust.

Apart from the above effects, the dust image imparts an air of grossness to the person of Mr. Tulkinghorn, and the portrayal of Mrs. Snagsby illustrates this further. She is also inquisitive and secretive. She pursues 'her object of detecting and confounding her false husband, night and day'...and Dickens's final touch shows her as 'bringing here, and taking everywhere, her own dense atmosphere of dust, arising from the ceaseless working of her mill of jealousy'. (BH, Ch. LIV)

There is not much dust in Hard Times but what there is of it, is highly suggestive. The descriptions of Coketown strongly recall those of the Black Country in the Curiosity Shop:

> 'It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. V)

As with the industrial scene, so with the political:

> 'Mr. Gradgrind, apprised of his wife's decease, made an expedition from London, and buried her in a business-like manner. He then returned with promptitude to the national cinder-heap, and resumed his sifting for the odds and ends he wanted, and his throwing of the dust about into the eyes of other people who wanted other odds and ends - in fact resumed his parliamentary duties.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. XI)

And just as this business-like winding-up of a matrimonial life has been depicted here in the context of dust, exactly so the setting-up of a matrimonial life has been earlier attended by the dust image. Mr. Gradgrind asks Louisa if she has secretly entertained any proposal other than Bounderby's, and she helplessly says:

> '"What do I know, father,...of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections,... What escape have I had from problems that could be demonstrated, and realities that could be grasped?" As she said it, she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and slowly opened it as though she were releasing dust or ash.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. XV)

The symbolic touch in the last sentence suggests the failure of the contemplated union.[1]

Thus workshop, Parliament, home, all mean an ugly and futile process of deception and waste.

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1. The matrimonial failure in Dombey is also realized through a similar image:
> 'Their pride, however different in kind and object, was equal in degree; and, in their flinty opposition, struck out fire between them which might smoulder or might blaze, as circumstances were, but burned up everything within their mutual reach, and made their marriage way a road of ashes.' (DS, Ch. XLVII)

In Great Expectations Dickens subtly touches upon the propriety of sentimental behaviour. Bound for London, Pip says good-bye to Joe and, 'in a moment with a strong heave and sob' he breaks into tears:

> 'Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts.' (GE, Ch. XIX)

It is a petty vanity in men to restrain the love and gratitude in their hearts from welling up into their eyes, and it is as blinding as dust itself. Perhaps Dickens is trying to meet here the charge of sentimentality against himself.

In 'Somebody's Luggage', in the Christmas Number of All the Year Round for 1862, Dickens depicts the miserable life of a 'Waiter' whose couch has been 'sawdust', and counterpane 'ashes of cigars'. But the important point is the suggestive name of the wretched place where he has been brought up, i.e., the Dust-Bin or the 'Royal Old Dust-Bin (said to have been so named by George the Fourth)'. This does not go to prove much, but it does mean that dust imagery and social misery jointly occupied Dickens's attention to figure prominently later in Our Mutual Friend.

In that novel Dickens introduces the dust image at a dinner party at the Veneerings'. Talking about young Harmon, Mortimer begins to discuss his father, 'a tremendous old rascal who made his money by Dust':

> 'he grew rich as a Dust Contractor, and lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-

> dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough dust and sifted dust - all manner of Dust.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. II)

This description seems to sum up the one in 'Dust; Ugliness Redeemed' discussed earlier. Further on in the book also, there are long accounts of the secret nocturnal activities, of Mr. Boffin with his dark lantern on the one hand and of Mr. Wegg and Mr. Venus on the other, on the Mounds in expectations of money and papers. Perhaps this atmosphere of crazy search and half-lights also derives from the Household Words story.

There is a considerable scattering of dust over a large part of the novel. Over and over again, in one form or another, one catches a glimpse of it. Mr. Boffin claims to be 'a pretty fair scholar in dust', and Mr. Venus adds his testimony to the fact before Mr. Wegg:

> "The old gentleman wanted to know the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust; and many's the bone, and feather, and what not, that he's brought to me." (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. VII)

Then Betty Higden brings it in when revealing her mortal dread of the Poor-house:

> "Kill me sooner than take me there. Throw this pretty child under cart-horses' feet and a loaded waggon, sooner than take him there. Come to us and find us all a dying, and set a light to us all where we lie, and let us all blaze away with the house into a heap of cinders, sooner than move a corpse of us there!" (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XVI)

Again, when old Harmon is discovered dead in his bed, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin 'seal up his box, always standing on the table at the side of his bed', and then Mr. Boffin hastens to the Temple, because he has frequently heard it is 'a spot where lawyer's dust is contracted for'.

It figures yet again, showing how mammonism becomes the great vogue:

> 'And now, in the blooming summer days, behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XVII)

The comparison between dust and money is manifest. Both alike choke the breath of life, i.e., sentiment and feeling,...and both join to suggest the blinding and hardening forces at work among men. Thus the dust-environed, dust-preoccupied old Harmon becomes specially capable of unnatural and inhuman behaviour. He comes to derive 'highest gratification from anathematising his nearest relations and turning them out of doors'. His wife, daughter, son, all suffer at his hands, one after another. He intends to settle upon his daughter, as a marriage portion, nobody knows 'how much Dust, but something immense'. But she does not agree to marry according to his wishes, because

> 'such a marriage would make Dust of her heart and Dust of her life - in short, would set her up, on a very extensive scale, in her father's business.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. II)

The situation here is similar to that in Hard Times, i.e., the prospect of matrimony with money but without love. Louisa yields to it while Miss Harmon rejects it, but both land themselves in a waste, one in a waste of the spirit and the other in a waste of the body. Dust and ashes of their fathers' making, but dust and ashes none the less. And these are the very terms in which Dickens depicts each situation, and, of course, with a clear symbolic intent. However, his is, above all, a world of hope, and just as there is a Sleary for a Gradgrind, there is a Boffin for a Harmon. Everything in life should not, and does not, go the way of dust. Mr. Boffin is relating to Mortimer the pitiful account of young Harmon's departure for South

Africa and Mrs. Boffin's great affection and deep concern for the child:

> "So of a night, when it was very cold, or when the wind roared, or the rain dripped heavy, she would wake sobbing, and call out in a fluster, 'Don't you see the poor child's face? O shelter the poor child!' - till in course of years it gently wore out, as many things do."
>
> '"My dear Mr. Boffin, everything wears to rags," said Mortimer, with a light laugh.
>
> '"I won't go so far as to say everything," returned Mr. Boffin, on whom his manner seemed to grate, "because there's some things that I never found among the dust."' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. VIII)

But what is not found among the dust, and what does not become dust is steadfast and selfless devotion to human feeling. It is in the Boffins amidst their plenty; it is in Betty Higden amidst her poverty. This devotion to human feeling as against material gain is for Dickens the value of values, as in fact it has always been. But it appears that in Our Mutual Friend, once for all, he is determined to sit in severe judgement on human motive and character in the context of money, and he seems to carry out his resolve with a near ruthlessness.

Old Harmon is not alone in his worship of dust or money; almost everybody appears to believe in the 'Gospel of Mammonism' to use Carlylean language. Material aggrandizement is what vitalizes the 'new' fashionable society as it is represented at the Veneerings':

> 'As is well known to the wise in their generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to have to do with in this world. Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything,

> never produced anything! Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares!' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. X)

Besides the cheating money broker, Fledgeby, there are the Lammles who carry mutual dupery into the sacrosanct sphere of matrimony. After the tragicomic scene during their honeymoon on the Shanklin sands - perhaps one of the greatest in Dickens - they agree to work together in furtherance of 'Any scheme that will bring...money':

> 'And who now so pleasant or so well assorted as Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle, he all sparkle, she all gracious contentment, both at occasional intervals exchanging looks like partners at cards, who played a game against All England.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XI)

Again, it is money that makes the whole world go down in its knees before Mr. and Mrs. Boffin 'established in the eminently aristocratic mansion'.

But this dust-charged atmosphere is densest around the figure of Bella. In fact Dickens appears to unfold the conflict between 'dust' and 'non-dust' primarily through her. For, old Harmon's motive runs on in the story: he wishes his own daughter to marry against her heart for his 'dust' and he likewise wills that another's daughter marry his son for his 'dust' regardless of her heart. And it is perhaps this very motive which forms the creative basis of the whole novel.

Hemmed in on all sides by the 'dust' craze in society, the flame of Bella's girlish sensibility leaps and trembles most naturally. But what gives it a distinct significance is the cruel ring of trial

Dickens closes round her.[1] It seems that in quest of a great truth he is making a great experiment. Otherwise the design would not have been so calculated; nor would the treatment have so bordered on the callous.

The centre of the dusty stage in Our Mutual Friend is held by the Boffins and young Harmon whom Dickens assigns the power of judging Bella's mettle. He gives them this privileged position, because possessed of 'dust' they stand for 'non-dust'. The Boffins are intended as the hypothesis of virtue: it is in their nature to be good and true. Young Harmon is so too; but he is also curious and brings into the story an element of secret investigation. Thus the trio puts on one long act to discover the secret of a maiden's heart.

The Wilfers breathe in the same atmosphere as the rest of the world, and material aggrandizement is no less a motive force in their modest home than in the fashionable houses of the Veneerings and the Podsnaps. After young Harmon's reported death, Bella, in a widow's weeds but without ever having married, reviews her position before the family:

> "It's a shame! There never was such a hard case! I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know what an embarrassing meeting it would be, and how we never could pretend to have an inclination of our own, either of us. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him - how could I like him, left to him in a will, like a dozen of spoons... I declare again it's a shame! Those ridiculous points would have been

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1. There is another ring of trial - the one closed round the low-natured villainous Wegg. Mr. Boffin, in confidence with Mr. Venus, gives a long rope to this thankless wily creature so that he hangs himself surely. Thus money or 'dust' can turn any head and blind any eyes. But there is hope again: even for a Wegg there is a Venus.

> smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money - want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. But here I am, left with all the ridiculous parts of the situation remaining, and added to them all, this ridiculous dress!" (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. IV)

Long afterwards when prosperity appears to bring deterioration in Mr. Boffin, the 'non-dust' in Bella's nature is awakened. But the 'dust' in it is not yet dispelled. A conflict is obvious in what she says to her 'Pa':

> "but every day he changes for the worse and for the worse. Not to me - he is always much the same to me - but to others about him. Before my eyes he grows suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust. If ever a good man were ruined by good fortune, it is my benefactor. And yet, Pa, think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and don't know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!" (OMF, Bk. III, Ch. IV)

This conflict is intensified by Mr. Boffin's homilies and exhortations to Bella:

> "We've got to hold our own now, against everybody (for everybody's hand is stretched out to be dipped into our pockets), and have got to recollect that money makes money, as well as makes everything else." (OMF, Bk. III, Ch. V)

> "You are right. Go in for money, my love. Money's the article... You'll live and die rich. That's the state to live and die in!... R...r...rich!" (Ibid.)

And finally when Mr. Boffin drives out the Secretary, the conflict is resolved, and the 'non-dust' in Bella shines out in full splendour. She calls him 'Monster' and 'Demon' and sides with the wronged young man:

> "I would rather he thought well of me...though he swept the street for bread, than that you did, though you splashed the mud upon him from the wheels of a chariot of pure gold. - There!" (OMF, Bk. III, Ch. XV)

At last she shakes off the 'dust' of her feet and goes back to

her poor dear Pa. She spurns material gain and pledges allegiance to human feeling.

Dickens brings about this change in Bella through a device of make-believe, long-protracted and tortuous: three persons acting, and in unison, as on the stage and one person living as in life. John Harmon and the Boffins live too, but differently - they only behind the scenes, he also with Bella in private. So he acts as well as lives. He is the 'Secretary', 'Our Mutual Friend'.

Two points seem to emerge from the above. First, of all the 'dust' lying so thick on everything in the world that which covers a young lady's heart preparing for matrimony is the most hateful to Dickens, because in it, above all, human feeling alone should reign supreme. The soundness of the others' emotional effects, the Boffins' or John Harmon's, may be taken for granted but not so that of Bella's; it must be proved. It is no wonder then that Dickens has followed the entire course of the experiment in the relentless spirit of a psycho-analyst. Her triumph is the triumph of the human heart. And that is the greatest Dickensian truth.

Secondly, there is the question of identity. John Harmon wants to see the real Bella by concealing himself, and the murderous assault on him by his own confidant only serves to confirm his design. This craze to see others naked from behind a curtain cannot mean the mystical desire to find Truth by losing Self,[1] because the context is too 'dusty' for such a chaste note. It only means a respectable measure of moral sense combined with a great deal of detective

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1. Dickens talks of Self in fairly deep tones and quite at length in Chuzzlewit, Chapters XXXIII and LII.

inquisitiveness. John Harmon seems to hate his position as well as enjoy it. He does not want to be married for money, but he relishes the interesting experiment the situation admits of.

It may be of interest to explain Dickens's preoccupation with the question of identity and the problem of love and money in the sphere of matrimony, and some facts of his private life seem to have a bearing upon this point. If the latest biographical studies are to be believed, then by this time[1] matters had come to such a pass between him and Ellen Ternan that he had to 'hide' himself for certain intervals of time. Perhaps the knot of identity[2] had begun to rub against his consciousness much earlier so that John Harmon, alias Julius Handford, alias John Rokesmith only constituted an imaginative anticipation of the cloaks he might himself need.

Again, his mind might well have been tortured by doubts: Had Ellen become his mistress for his money and name, or for love? Ellen's deep sense of remorse[3] for this episode, expressed to a friend,

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1. Felix Aylmer, Dickens Incognito, (1959), p. 88, places 'the date of Ellen's final surrender either before Our Mutual Friend was begun or early in the course of its composition: i.e., before May 1864, or early in 1865.'
   Of course, Felix Aylmer's inferences are to be discounted in their more serious aspect. See the November 22, 1959 issue of the Sunday Times for a review of his book and the December 13, 1959 issue for Graham Storey's refutation and Felix Aylmer's apology.
2. The problem of identity had figured earlier, too. In Dorrit it was a villain's need - Rigaud, alias Blandois, alias Lagnier. In the Tale it worked through resemblance involving Sydney Carton in a selfless, sublime way.
3. Thomas Wright, The Life of Charles Dickens, (1935), p. 281: '"The first thing that tempts young women," Lady Godolphin used to say, "is vanity"; and that was Miss Ternan's weakness, or rather combined with a desire for a competence. If Dickens's conduct spoilt Miss Ternan's life, it certainly went very far to spoiling his own. He could not be happy (how could he!) knowing that Miss Ternan was assailing herself with reproaches and drawing daily further and further from him. They were both of them latterly miserable, and Dickens's unhappiness is reflected in his later books, which can be understood only in the light of this knowledge.'

Canon Benham, suggests that there was room for Dickens's mental torment in regard to the real state of her affections.

Apart from the social, emotional, and autobiographical implications of the dust idea discussed above, there is visible relevance in the realms of the past. Side by side with the two searches going on in the novel - one for the latest will on 'them Mounds' and the other for the truth in Bella's nature - there continues a laborious sifting of the historical rubbish, first of Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and then of Rollin's Ancient History. Dickens is seen here at variance with Carlyle's dictator-hero philosophy,[1] whose views, otherwise, were generally his own. The scoffing reference to Alexander the Great[2] and the words,

> 'the downward fortunes of these enervated and corrupted masters of the world who were by this time on their last legs' (OMF, Bk. II, Ch. VII),

clearly show that Dickens is satirizing the rotten warrior-conqueror edifice and at the same time supplying an additional - and historical - tier to the rubbish-heap symbolism. The accounts of the rise and fall of empires are, like 'them Mounds', only so much dust on the shelves of Time.[3]

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1. It may, however, be noted that in spite of all his hero-worship Carlyle himself many a time, e.g., in his essay, 'Sir Walter Scott', depicted the futility of popular fame and human greatness.
2. Our Mutual Friend, Book III, Chapter VI. See also The Mudfog Papers: 'One flea, reduced to the level of a beast of burden, was drawing about a miniature gig, containing a particularly small effigy of His grace the Duke of Wellington; while another was staggering beneath the weight of a golden model of his great adversary Napoleon Bonaparte.' (MP, 'Report of the First Meeting of the Mudfog Association')
3. Cf. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, Chapter II. See Appendix D, p. 442.

In Edwin Drood the eerie atmosphere of the old Cathedral, especially its Precincts, is evoked through an appeal to superstition and reflection. The citizens of Cloisterham avoid this spot after dark because of 'the innate shrinking of dust with the breath of life in it from dust out of which the breath of life has passed'.

This reference to the dead in the churchyard is similar to that in Chuzzlewit discussed earlier with the difference that it is deeper in note and brought to bear upon an aspect of supernatural fear rather than chastened thought.

But there is a more important appearance of 'dust'. When Edwin and Rosa agree to release each other from the marital bond intended for them, he decides to return the wedding-ring not to her but to her guardian, Mr. Grewgious, because she would be grieved by 'those sorrowful jewels':

> 'They were but a sign of broken joys and baseless projects; in their very beauty, they were (as the unlikeliest of men had said), almost a cruel satire on the loves, hopes, plans, of humanity, which are able to forecast nothing, and are so much brittle dust. Let them be. He would restore them to her guardian when he came down; he in his turn would restore them to the cabinet from which he had unwillingly taken them; and there, like old letters or old vows, or other records of old aspirations come to nothing, they would be disregarded, until, being valuable, they were sold into circulation again, to repeat their former round.' (MED, Ch. XIII)

The stones belonged to Rosa's departed mother and, in time, they would be Rosa's. They are 'brittle dust', but 'being valuable' they will pass from hand to hand, exposing in their ceaseless course the frailty and futility of the loves and hopes and joys and plans of men. The situation involves imposed matrimony and 'dust' again, and perhaps as significantly as before. If - and it is indeed a big if - one is to accept the view that Lucie in A Tale of Two Cities, Estella in

Great Expectations, Bella in Our Mutual Friend and both Rosa Bud and Helena Landless in Edwin Drood are all projections of Ellen Ternan, and that Dickens's treatment of them reveals progressively the stage reached in his relations with her at the time of writing, a reference may again be made to the issues raised above in the matter of Bella's trial. Perhaps by September 1869 - when Dickens began writing Drood - the clouds of estrangement had already appeared. Perhaps Dickens had realized that it was not love that had brought about Ellen's surrender but only 'a desire for a competence'. Perhaps presents and gifts made and accepted earlier had lost their meaning of hope and joy and had become 'brittle dust' and stung him as 'a cruel satire' on his love.

It may be clear from this discussion that in Dickens's work dust primarily symbolizes all that obstructs clear vision and true feeling. And what does these two jobs best is filthy lucre. Politics and industry are plagued by it. Love and matrimony are threatened by it. History bears the marks of its ravages. Nature herself is stifled and scorched by it. Almost all men are susceptible to its evil influence.

It may also be clear that for its associations of creation and mortality Dickens uses dust to release a wave of sad sobriety over a character's consciousness or to deepen the supernatural effect of a setting. And its physical properties - its sheer grossness, for instance, - he can exploit in the interests of both character and setting. Perhaps the description of Mr. Tulkinghorn and his room in Bleak House is the finest illustration of what genius can make of an

ordinary image and its commonplace shades of meaning.

Water and dust meet in, or separate from, mud, and Dickens's observation is very keen on this ordinary physical fact. Over and over again, in conceiving a character, in laying a scene of action, or in creating an over-all effect, he makes use of it and invests it with a varying measure of suggestiveness.

In Pickwick the Chancery prisoner in the Fleet depicts the hopelessness of his life in terms of oozy mud:

> 'If I lay dead at the bottom of the deepest mine in the world, tight screwed down and soldered in my coffin, rotting in the dark and filthy ditch that drags its slime along beneath the foundation of this prison, I could not be more forgotten or unheeded than I am here.' (PP, Ch. XLI)

This serves the dual purpose of satirizing the torture inflicted by Chancery as well as of exposing the squalor bred by the Fleet. Incidentally, the reference to 'the dark and filthy ditch' brings out in relief an actual feature of the prison.[1]

There are similar descriptions in Oliver, but the emphasis passes from the institutional to the social. Oliver has already been conveyed by Fagin's gang to a house in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel, and he is hastening to the place:

> 'The mud lay thick upon the stones: and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down: and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal.' (OT, Ch. XIX)

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1. Alfred Trumble, In Jail with Charles Dickens (1896), p. 92.

The time, the place, and the weather all conspire to portray Fagin's character. This treatment points forward to the perfect blending of Quilp in the Curiosity Shop with the foul lonely riverside, his life and death being of a piece with his surroundings. Nor is Riderhood in Our Mutual Friend wholly unimaginable, because 'it is impossible for imagination to detach the water-snake from the water, the water-rat from the mud'.[1]

Again, when Mr. and Mrs. Bumble set out to have their dark dealings with Monks, they direct 'their course towards a scattered little colony of ruinous houses...erected on a low unwholesome swamp, bordering upon the river'. (OT, Ch. XXXVIII)

The humanitarian note enters with the suggestion of social misery. Nancy says to Rose Maylie:

> "Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady,...that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and - and something worse than all - as I have been from my cradle; I may use the word, for the alley and the gutter were mine, as they will be my death-bed." (OT, Ch. XL)

Whereas Fagin is identified with dirt and filth, Nancy is shown to have actually sprung up from their midst. Her acute sense of disadvantage, in regard to birth and up-bringing and in the context of her present wretched life, reveals how severely the essential good in her nature has been tried. The physical is linked here with the moral and anticipates in some measure the point and thrust of the social criticism in Bleak House.

Again, in Chapter L, 'The Pursuit and Escape', there 'stands Jacob's Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch...once called Mill Pond,

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1. A.C. Swinburne, Charles Dickens (1931), p. 61.

but known in these days as Folly Ditch'. The scene excites the 'utmost astonishment' of 'a stranger':

> 'Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half-a-dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out, on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it - as some have done; dirt-besmeared walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.' (OT, Ch. L)

This setting provides a fit trap for Sikes, and before he takes the final plunge only to be caught up in a halter, there is a single-line paragraph:

> 'The water was out, and the ditch a bed of mud.'[1]

Besides these muddy features, Oliver holds the key to the complex symbolic processes of more than a decade later. It is significant that the novel, as it first appeared serially in Bentley's Miscellany in February 1837, was set in 'Mudfog'. This descriptive and suggestive name came from Dickens's January contribution to the Miscellany, "Public Life of Mr. Tulrumble, Once Mayor of Mudfog," which opened as follows:

> 'Mudfog is a pleasant town - a remarkably pleasant town - situated in a charming hollow by the side of a river, from which river, Mudfog derives an agreeable scent of pitch, tar, coals, and rope-yarn, a roving population in oil-skin hats, a pretty steady influx of drunken bargemen, and a great many other maritime advantages. There is a great deal of water about Mudfog, and yet it is not exactly the sort of town for a watering-place, either.

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1. Mr. Lillyvick is a water-rate collector in Nickleby. After his old-age matrimonial adventure with Miss Petowker has ended in her elopement with a half-pay captain, he sums up the position: "Matter, Sir!...The plug of life is dry, Sir, and but the mud is left."

> Water is a perverse sort of element at the best of times, and in Mudfog it is particularly so. In winter, it comes oozing down the streets and tumbling over the fields, - nay, rushes into the very cellars and kitchens of the houses, with a lavish prodigality that might well be dispensed with; but in the hot summer weather it will dry up, and turn green: and, although green is a very good colour in its way, especially in grass, still it certainly is not becoming to water, and it cannot be denied that the beauty of Mudfog is rather impaired, even by this trifling circumstance. Mudfog is a healthy place - very healthy; - damp, perhaps, but none the worse for that. It's quite a mistake to suppose that damp is unwholesome: plants thrive best in damp situations, and why shouldn't men? The inhabitants of Mudfog are unanimous in asserting that there exists not a finer race of people on the face of the earth; here we have an indisputable and veracious contradiction of the vulgar error at once. So, admitting Mudfog to be damp, we distinctly state that it is salubrious.' (MP, 'Public Life of Mr. Tulrumble')

The 'Mudfog' idea, underlined by the perverseness of water as an element and its attendants of 'scent' and 'green' and 'damp', is emphasized throughout, as in 'Mudfog Hall, Mudfog Hill, Mudfog'. This seems to point forward to Bleak House. The conversion of Nicholas Tulrumble who suppresses 'the fiddle and tambourine'at the Jolly Boatmen in the interests of public morality, faintly anticipates that of Scrooge short of its supernatural devices. Again, the 'Full' reports of the First and Second Meetings of the 'Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything', published in the Miscellany in October 1837 and September 1838, appear to indicate the general trend of Dickens's mind for the next fifteen years or so. The system of infinitesimal doses, as applied to feeding and as recommended to 'the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen' indirectly repeats the protest of "Please, Sir, I want some more," in Chapter II of Oliver and promises The Chimes in a certain measure. Statistics and magistracy, Philosophy and the craze for the spread of Science, all come up for punishment one by one. In the December 1836 edition of the Sketches

Dickens had rendered the references to Parliament less indignant in tone,[1] but in The Mudfog Papers[2] his patience with 'official oratory' seems to have been exhausted:

> 'Night after night will they twist and tumble about, till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning; playing the strangest antics, and giving each other the funniest slaps on the face that can possibly be imagined, without evincing the smallest tokens of fatigue. The strange noises, the confusion, the shouting and roaring, amid which all this is done, too, would put to shame the most turbulent sixpenny gallery that ever yelled through a boxing-night.' (MP, 'The Pantomime of Life')

The fun and fury here point forward to the scathing criticism of Parliament and Government in Bleak House, Hard Times and Dorrit.

Again, the interesting discussion about 'the names and numbers of children's books principally in circulation', leads inevitably to the contrast of Fact and Fancy in Hard Times:[3]

> "MR. SLUG stated to the section the result of some calculations he had made with great difficulty and labour, regarding the state of infant education among the middle classes of London. He found that, within a circle of three miles from the Elephant and Castle, the following were the names and numbers of children's books principally in circulation:
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> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Jack the Giant-killer ..... | 7,943 |
> | Ditto and Bean-stalk ..... | 8,621 |
> | Ditto and Eleven Brothers ... | 2,845 |
> | Ditto and Jill ..... | 1,998 |
> | Total | 21,407 |
>
> "He found that the proportion of Robinson Crusoes to Philip Quarlls was as four and a half to one; and that the preponderance of Valentine and Orsons over Goody Two Shoeses was as three and an eighth of the former to half a one of the latter; a comparison of Seven Champions with Simple Simons gave the same result. The ignorance that prevailed, was lamentable. One child, on being

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1. Butt and Tillotson, pp. 51-54.
2. See 'Report of the Second Meeting of the Mudfog Association' and 'The Pantomime of life'.
3. Mr. Gradgrind asks Sissy Jupe if she read to her father, and she sobs out: "About the Fairies, sir, and the Dwarf and the Hunchbank, and the Genies..."

asked whether he would rather be Saint George of England, or a respectable tallow-chandler, instantly replied, 'Taint George of Ingling'. Another, a little boy of eight years old, was found to be firmly impressed with a belief in the existence of dragons, and openly stated that it was his intention when he grew up, to rush forth sword in hand for the deliverance of captive princesses, and the promiscuous slaughter of giants. Not one child among the number interrogated had ever heard of Mungo Park, - some inquiring whether he was at all connected with the black man that swept the crossing; and others whether he was in any way related to the Regent's Park. They had not the slightest conception of the commonest principles of mathematics, and considered Sinbad the Sailor the most enterprising voyager that the world had ever produced.

"A Member strongly deprecating the use of all the other books mentioned, suggested that Jack and Jill might perhaps be exempted from the general censure, inasmuch as the hero and heroine, in the very outset of the tale, were depicted as going <u>up</u> a hill to fetch a pail of water, which was a laborious and useful occupation, - supposing the family linen was being washed, for instance.

"MR. SLUG feared that the moral effect of this passage was more than counterbalanced by another in a subsequent part of the poem, in which very gross allusion was made to the mode in which the heroine was personally chastised by her mother

"'For laughing at Jack's disaster;'

besides, the whole work had this one fault, <u>it was not true</u>.

"THE PRESIDENT complimented the honourable member on the excellent distinction he had drawn. Several other Members, too, dwelt upon the immense and urgent necessity of storing the minds of children with nothing but facts and figures; which process, the President very forcibly remarked, had made them (the section) the men they were." (MP, 'Report of the First Meeting...')

And similarly the 'newly-invented spectacles' reflect the 'Telescopic Philanthropy' in <u>Bleak House</u>:

"MR. TICKLE displayed his newly-invented spectacles, which enabled the wearer to discern, in very bright colours, objects at a great distance, and rendered him wholly blind to those immediately before him. It was, he said, a most valuable and useful invention, based strictly upon the principle of the human eye.

"THE PRESIDENT required some information upon this point. He had yet to learn that the human eye was remarkable for the peculiarities of which the honourable gentleman had spoken.

> "MR. TICKLE was rather astonished to hear this, when the President could not fail to be aware that a large number of most excellent persons and great statesmen could see, with the naked eye, most marvellous horrors on West India plantations, while they could discern nothing whatever in the interior of Manchester cotton mills." (MP, 'Report of the Second Meeting...')

Thus Dickens not only satirizes the proceedings of the recently-established British Association for the Advancement of Science, but he paints in miniature, almost the whole contemporary scene, and it is very significant that he finds it fully covered and defined by the term 'Mudfog'. None the less the meaning is convincingly couched in the physical features of the town. The reader frequently moves 'through the dirt and wet of Mudfog streets' and 'through pools of water and hillocks of mud'.

As hinted at earlier, Quilp's counting-house in the Curiosity Shop stands on the filthy river bank. It is the cannibal's 'lair', 'the ogre's castle', and when fleeing it, he accidentally oversets the stove, and all is ablaze. Then he is swept away a corpse, the river toying and sporting with it, 'now bruising it against the slimy piles, now hiding it in mud or long rank grass', at last flinging it 'on a swamp'. This ignoble end seems to recall that of Sikes in Oliver.

In the Notes there is a considerable sprawling of mud. A brief reference has already been made to 'the hateful Mississippi' circling and eddying...a slimy monster hideous to behold... An enormous ditch, sometimes two or three miles wide, running liquid mud, six miles an hour...'

In addition to this there is the mud of the road. On the way to the Looking-Glass Prairie

'We had a pair of very strong horses, but travelled at the rate of little more than a couple of miles an hour, through one unbroken slough of black mud and water. It had no variety but in depth... Here and there we passed a log hut: but the wretched cabins were wide apart and thinly scattered, for though the soil is very rich in this place, few people can exist in such a deadly atmosphere. On either side of the track, if it deserve the name, was the thick "bush"; and everywhere was stagnant, slimy, rotten, filthy water.'

'Belleville was a small collection of wooden houses, huddled together in the very heart of the bush and swamp.'

'The horses belonging to the bar, the judge, and witnesses, were tied to temporary racks set up roughly in the road; by which is to be understood, a forest path, nearly knee-deep in mud and slime.'

'The track of to-day had the same features as the track of yesterday. There was the swamp, the bush, and the perpetual chorus of frogs, the rank unseemly growth, the unwholesome steaming earth...the team of oxen crouching down mournfully in the mud...' (AN, Ch. XIII)

'A great portion of the way was over what is called a corduroy road, which is made by throwing trunks of trees into a marsh, and leaving them to settle there.' (AN, Ch. XIV)

This journeying through the bogs and swamps is extremely hateful to Dickens's eye, but it appears that these muddy sights no less offended his sense of smell. Stench is only faintly suggested in the description of Folly Ditch in Oliver quoted earlier, and it grows a little sharper in the description of Mudfog cited above. But in the Notes it becomes sharper and sharper.

'Mile after mile of stunted trees: some hewn down by the axe, some blown down by the wind, some half fallen and resting on their neighbours, many mere logs half hidden in the swamp, others mouldered away to spongy chips. The very soil of the earth is made up of minute fragments such as these; each pool of stagnant water has its crust of vegetable rottenness; on every side there are the boughs, and trunks, and stumps of trees, in every possible stage of decay, decomposition, and neglect.' (AN, Ch. IV)

'A dismal swamp, on which the half-built houses rot away: cleared here and there for the space of a few yards; and teeming, then, with rank unwholesome vegetation, in whose baleful

shade the wretched wanderers who are tempted hither, droop, and die, and lay their bones;' (AN, Ch. XII)

'There was the swamp, the bush, and the perpetual chorus of frogs, the rank unseemly growth, the unwholesome steaming earth.' (AN, Ch. XIII)

In Chuzzlewit the stench of stuffy rot is extremely varied and unbearably offensive:

'Several fruit-brokers had their marts near Todgers's; and one of the first impressions wrought upon the stranger's senses was of oranges - of damaged oranges, with blue and green bruises on them, festering in boxes, or mouldering away in cellars. All day long, a stream of porters from the wharves beside the river, each bearing on his back a bursting chest of oranges, poured slowly through the narrow passages... There were churches also by dozens, with many a ghostly little churchyard, all overgrown with such straggling vegetation as springs up spontaneously from damp, and graves, and rubbish. In some of these dingy resting-places, which bore much the same analogy to green churchyards, as the pots of earth for mignonette and wall-flower in the windows overlooking them, did to rustic gardens, there were trees; tall trees; still putting forth their leaves in each succeeding year, with such a langhishing remembrance of their kind...as birds in cages have of theirs.' (MC, Ch. IX)

The 'hemmed in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene', where Nemo in Bleak House is buried, appears to be promised here.

Young Martin and Mark Tapley are approaching their estate in Eden:

'Sky, wood, and water, all the livelong day: and heat that blistered everything it touched.

'On they toiled through great solitudes, where the trees upon the banks grew thick and close; and floated in the stream; and held up shrivelled arms from out the river's depths; and slid down from the margin of the land: half-growing, half decaying, in the miry water. On through the weary day and melancholy night: beneath the burning sun, and in the mist and vapour of the evening: on, until return appeared impossible, and restoration to their home a miserable dream.' (MC, Ch. XXIII)

'A flat morass, bestrewn with fallen timber; a marsh on which the good growth of the earth seemed to have been wrecked and cast away, that from its decomposing ashes vile and ugly things might rise; where the very trees took the aspect of huge weeds, begotten of the slime from which they sprang, by the hot

sun that burnt them up; where fatal maladies, seeking whom they might infect, came forth at night, in misty shapes, and creeping out upon the water, hunted them like spectres until day; where even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror; this was the realm of Hope through which they moved.' (Ibid.)

'In some quarters, a snake of zigzag fence had been begun, but in no instance had it been completed; and the fallen logs, half hidden in the soil, lay mouldering away... A fetid vapour, hot and sickening as the breath of an oven, rose up from the earth, and hung on everything around; and as his footprints sank into the marshy ground, a black ooze started forth to blot them out.

'The trees had grown so thick and close that they shouldered one another out of their places, and the weakest, forced into shapes of strange distortion languished like cripples. The best were stunted, from the pressure and the want of room; and high about the stems of all, grew long rank grass, dank weeds, and frowsy underwood; not divisible into their separate kinds, but tangled all together in a heap; a jungle deep and dark, with neither earth nor water at its roots, but putrid matter, formed of the pulpy offal of the two, and of their own corruption.' (Ibid.)

That was how young Martin and Mark Tapley first saw their own land in Eden, and this is how they saw it for the last time:

'They looked at one another, as the vessel moved away, and then looked backward at the spot from which it hurried fast. The loghouse, with the open door, and drooping trees about it; the stagnant morning mist, and red sun, dimly seen beyond; the vapour rising up from land and river; the quick stream making the loathsome banks it washed, more flat and dull: how often they returned in dreams!...' (Ibid.)

These descriptions breathe an oppressive air of decomposition and rot which definitely glides into the atmosphere of Bleak House. But there is a little more for that novel here, and that in the image of the Deluge. It appears in the depiction of Lowell in the Notes:

'It was a very dirty winter's day, and nothing in the whole town looked old to me, except the mud, which in some parts was almost knee-deep, and might have been deposited there, on the subsiding of the waters after the Deluge.' (AN, Ch. IV)

It recurs in Chuzzlewit in a general view of the Valley of Eden:

> 'The waters of the Deluge might have left it but a week before: so choked with slime and matted growth was the hideous swamp which bore that name.' (AN, Ch. XXIII)

Thus there is every reason to assert that the mud setting of Chancery is also prefigured here.

These impressions and images continue to live and grow stronger through the Pictures. Dickens is on the way to Milan, and

> 'It lay through mist, mud, and rain... Then we went on, through more mud, mist, and rain, and marshy ground:' (PI, 'By Verona, Mantua...')

> 'A filthy channel of mud and refuse meanders down the centre of the miserable streets, fed by obscene rivulets that trickle from the abject houses. There is not a door, a window, or a shutter; not a roof, a wall, a post, or a pillar, in all Fondi, but is decayed, and crazy, and rotting away...' (PI, 'A Rapid Diorma')

In Dombey mud appears only metaphorically when Mrs. Brown and Alice Marwood watch James Carker ride by and think they are mud, 'underneath his horse's feet'. But in Copperfield the description of Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse is more significant:

> 'It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out... Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase...and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant.' (DC, Ch. XI)

On his way to Dover, David reaches Chatham 'which in that night's aspect, is a mere dream of chalk, and drawbridges, and mastless ships in a muddy river, roofed like Noah's arks'. (DC, Ch. XIII)

Then David and Mr. Peggotty follow Martha directing her steps towards the river, and they reach near 'the great blank prison':

'A sluggish ditch deposited its mud at the prison walls. Coarse grass and rank weeds straggled over all the marshy land in the vicinity. In one part, carcases of houses, inauspiciously begun and never finished, rotted away... Slimy gaps and causeways, winding among old wooden piles, with a sickly substance clinging to the latter, like green hair, and the rags of last year's handbills offering rewards for drowned men fluttering above high-water mark, led down through the ooze and slush to the ebb-tide. There was a story that one of the pits dug for the dead in the time of the Great Plague was hereabout; and a blighting influence seemed to have proceeded from it over the whole place. Or else it looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream.

'As if she were a part of the refuse it had cast out, and left to corruption and decay, the girl...stood...lonely and still, looking at the water.' (DC, Ch. XLVII)

This is an important piece of description inasmuch as it blends social misery with physical rot far more effectively than ever before. But its importance increases manifold when the fallen Martha is represented as being of a piece with 'the refuse...left to corruption and decay'. That means assigning a definite symbolic role to it.

In view of the foregone, the setting of Chancery in <u>Bleak House</u> does not look unfamiliar, although nothing ever reached such perfection:

'London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes - gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.' (BH, Ch. I)

A rare pattern of beauty, this paragraph is bound by the law at one end and by money on the other, while its body is London life, fettered in mud and choked with soot. The rich array of images, evoked through poetic vision and charged with dramatic intensity, powerfully links the prehistoric with the contemporary. The Deluge idea of the Notes and Chuzzlewit recurs, but it is not bare and deserted: the biological[1] here 'waddles' over the biblical.

As suggested earlier, mud is a compromise between water and earth, and perhaps the nastiest of compromises. Its claim to recognition lies in its sticky quality and in its power to pollute and make things slippery. It is a great impediment in movement and recoils viciously when assailed, thus making progress with safety impossible. Soot and smoke and fog also form a part of the pattern quoted above, and they fill the atmosphere as mud covers the ground. A sense of suffocation and blinding confusion is thus added to a feeling of sticky stalemate - the channels of healthy life blocked, and all advance stopped: 'in the midst of the mud and at the heart

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1. Even the order of presentation bears an evolutionary mark - the face of the earth, the receding waters, the mud, the elephantine reptile, the quadrupeds, and the human bipeds. It is perhaps an influence of the biological advances made at the time under Lamarck, Richard Owen, Charles Darwin, and T.H. Huxley. As Science was linking creation in one evolutionary chain, Art in the hands of Dickens appears to reduce the human situation - as it then existed - to its first elements. At least the opening of Bleak House suggests such an approach.
   It may also be of interest to see how Carlyle enriched the Deluge image:
   'there in their silence, in their solitude, even as on the night when Noah's Deluge first dried!' (Sartor Resartus)
   'advancing on us like ocean-tides, like Noah's Deluges - of ditch water!' ('Sir Walter Scott')
   'Solution into universal slush, drownage of all interests divine and human, in a Noah's Deluge...' (Latter-Day Pamphlets)
   'Carcass of the drowned ass upon the mud-deluge.' (Ibid.)

of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.'

The setting and atmosphere of Chancery join to illustrate the stagnation and rot that grip mid-nineteenth century England. That is why this shackling, choking, mystifying note, so powerfully struck through mud, smoke, and fog, is subtly sustained throughout.

> 'The raw afternoon is rawest,...and the muddy streets are muddiest...near Temple Bar.' (BH, Ch. I)

And hard by Temple Bar is Chancery:

> 'Never...can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds...' (Ibid.)
>
> '"Mlud," says Mr. Tangle...
>
> .....
>
> '"Mlud, no - variety of points - feel it my duty tsubmit - ludship," is the reply that slides out of Mr. Tangle.' (Ibid.)

'My lord' on the tongue of Mr. Tangle becomes 'Mlud' which does not sound unlike 'mud'.

Nor does Lady Dedlock's 'place' in Lincolnshire look different:

> 'The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground, for half a mile in breadth, is a stagnant river...' (BH, Ch. II)

The brick-maker's in St. Albans is painted in the same muddy daubs:

> 'it was one of a cluster of wretched hovels in a brickfield, with pigsties close to the broken windows, and miserable little gardens before the doors, growing nothing but stagnant pools. Here and there, an old tub was put to catch the droppings of rain-water from a roof, or they were banked up with mud into a little pond like a large dirt-pie.' (BH, Ch. VIII)

And the inmates agree with the house:

> 'there were in this damp offensive room - a woman with a

black eye, nursing a poor little gasping baby by the fire; a man, all stained with clay and mud, and looking very dissipated, lying at full length on the ground, smoking a pipe; a powerful young man, fastening a collar on a dog; and a bold girl, doing some kind of washing in very dirty water.' (Ibid.)

Tom-all-Alone's and Jo are realized in the same key:

'It is a black, dilapidated street...where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced... Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing...evil in its every footprint...' (BH, Ch. XVI)

Jo lives in this 'ruinous place', and 'sweeps his crossing all day long':

'He sums up his mental condition, when asked a question, by replying that he "don't know nothink". He knows that it's hard to keep the mud off the crossing in dirty weather, and harder still to live by doing it. Nobody taught him, even that much; he found it out.' (Ibid.)

'The day changes as it wears itself away, and becomes dark and drizzly. Jo fights it out, at his crossing, among the mud and wheels, the horses, whips, and umbrellas, and gets but a scanty sum to pay for the unsavoury shelter of Tom-all-Alone's.' (Ibid.)

Mr. Bucket, assisted by the constable on duty and accompanied by Mr. Snagsby, visits Tom-all-Alone's:

'Between his two conductors, Mr. Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water - though the roads are dry elsewhere - and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses. Branching from this street and his heaps of ruins, are other streets and courts so infamous that Mr. Snagsby sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf.' (BH, Ch. XXII)

'On the banks of the stagnant channel of mud which is the main street of Tom-all-Alone's, nothing is to be seen but the crazy houses, shut up and silent.' (BH, Ch. XLVI)

And Lady Dedlock is found lying dead in the filthy graveyard:

'On the step at the gate, drenched in the fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everywhere, I saw with a cry of pity and horror, a woman lying' (BH, Ch. LIX)

Thus whether it be the High Court of Chancery, the fashionable countryhouse, the miserable town-slum, or the neglected burial-ground, mud appears in one form or another as an essential feature of the scene, and what is more, stagnation and rot, its close relations, figure almost as frequently, and it is chiefly through these that its symbolic meaning progresses effectively. The endless confused waste that Chancery is bringing about by slow degrees, is represented by Krook's warehouse, as the Lord Chancellor by Krook himself:

'She had stopped at a shop, over which was written KROOK, RAG AND BOTTLE WAREHOUSE. Also in long thin letters, KROOK, DEALER IN MARINE STORES. In one part of the window was a picture of a red paper mill, at which a cart was unloading a quantity of sacks of old rags. In another, was the inscription, BONES BOUGHT. In another, KITCHEN-STUFF BOUGHT. In another, OLD IRON BOUGHT. In another, WASTE PAPER BOUGHT. In another, LADIES' AND GENTLEMEN'S WARDROBES BOUGHT. Everything seemed to be bought, and nothing to be sold there. In all parts of the window were quantities of dirty bottles: blacking bottles, medicine bottles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles:...There were several second-hand bags, blue and red, hanging up. A little way within the shop-door, lay heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls, and discoloured and dog's-eared law papers. I could have fancied that all the rusty keys, of which there must have been hundreds huddled together as old iron, had once belonged to doors of rooms or strong chests in lawyers' offices. The litter of rags tumbled partly into and partly out of a one-legged wooden scale, hanging without any counterpoise from a beam, might have been counsellors' bands and gowns torn up. One had only to fancy... that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete.'

'You see I have so many things here...of so many kinds, and all...wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't abear to part with anything I once lay hold of...or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery. I don't mind. I go

> to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle...' (BH, Ch. V)

There is another layer to this confusion-waste symbolism, and that bears upon the 'telescopic philanthropy'[1] of Mrs. Jellyby:

> 'Caddy and I were attempting to establish some order among all this waste and ruin... But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened - bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle-ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nutshells heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas...' (BH, Ch. XXX)

Confusion and waste grip Chancery, Krook's, and Mrs. Jellyby's, and stagnation is their common mark, as it is of Chesney Wold. But there is the smell of the rot too. The 'scent' and 'green' and 'damp' caused by the 'perverse' element, water, in the town of 'Mudfog', and the offensive stench of decomposition and corruption in the Notes and Chuzzlewit are all here. But whereas there they appeared primarily as physical fact in description, or at best as recorded sensuous experience, in Bleak House they have a significant meaning to convey, a definite end to achieve; and it is precisely in this context that Krook and his warehouse come to give Chancery a pivotal position in the novel. The junk-shop not only represents Chancery and its proprietor the Lord Chancellor, but attended by the maliciously ominous cat Lady Jane, it also leads the way to Miss Flite and her caged birds and Captain Hawdon, alias Nemo the law-writer. Indirectly

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1. The theme was perhaps first touched upon in The Mudfog Papers (September 1838) and again in 'The Niger Expedition' in The Examiner on August 19, 1848.

through Miss Flite, Ada, Esther and Rick, and, through Nemo, Jo are brought on to the scene. Thus it is Krook's that links together Chancery, Chesney Wold, Bleak House and Tom-all-Alone's, and it is through a sense of confused waste on the one hand and an effect of disintegrating rot on the other, that Dickens weaves them all into a pattern of harmony. Confusion and waste have already been cited above, decomposition and rot await illustration.

The dull and depressing colours suggesting Lady Dedlock's boredom are strongly supported by unwholesome smell:

> 'The view from my Lady Dedlock's own windows is alternately a lead-coloured view, and a view in Indian ink. The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day; and the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called, from old time, the Ghost's Walk, all night. On Sundays, the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out into a cold sweat; and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves.' (BH, Ch. II)

Chesney Wold is 'shut up' for the winter:

> 'Howls the shrill wind round Chesney Wold; the sharp rain beats, the windows rattle, and the chimneys growl. Mists hide in the avenues, veil the points of view, and move in funeral-wise across the rising grounds. On all the house there is a cold, blank smell, like the smell of a little church, though something dryer: suggesting that the dead and buried Dedlocks walk there, in the long nights, and leave the flavour of their graves behind them.' (BH, Ch. XXIX)

Nemo dies, and is buried. The sense of smell imperceptibly passes into the sense of touch, and the social protest merges in the sublime note:

> 'Then the active and intelligent...bears off the body of our dear brother here departed, to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed...'
>
> 'With houses looking on, on every side, save where a reeking little tunnel of a court gives access to the iron gate - with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every

> poisonous element of death in action close on life - here, they lower our dear brother down a foot or two: here, sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at many a sick bedside: a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilisation and barbarism walked this boastful island together.'
>
> 'Come night, come darkness, for you cannot come too soon, or stay too long, by such a place as this!... Come, flame of gas, burning so sullenly above the iron gate, on which the poisoned air deposits its witch-ointment slimy to the touch! It is well that you should call to every passer-by, "Look here!"' (BH, Ch. XI)

Lady Dedlock is found dead in the same churchyard beside the grave of her lover:

> 'The gate was closed. Beyond it, was a burial-ground - a dreadful spot in which the night was very slowly stirring; but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses, with a few dull lights in their windows, and on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease.' (BH, Ch. LIX)

Mr. Vholes's chambers have their own smell:

> 'Mr. Vholes's office, in disposition retiring, and in situation retired, is squeezed up in a corner, and blinks at a dead wall. Three feet of knotty floored dark passage brings the client to Mr. Vholes's jet black door... A smell as of unwholesome sheep, blending with the smell of must and dust, is referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles, and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. The place was last painted or whitewashed beyond the memory of man, and the two chimneys smoke, and there is a loose outer surface of soot everywhere...' (BH, Ch. XXXIX)

As suggested above, Dickens achieves a unity of impression in Bleak House through a sense of confused waste and disintegrating rot, and it is interesting that both these effects best blend in the figure of Krook. If to the extracts - quoted earlier - depicting the chaotic ruin reigning over his warehouse be added the passages describing his death, the resultant picture will be of systematic human incineration amidst jumbled physical rot.

Tony tells Mr. Guppy that he could not make Krook hear,

"I softly opened the door and looked in. And the burning smell is there - and the soot is there, and the oil is there - and he is not there!..."

'They go down, more dead than alive, and holding one another, push open the door of the back shop. The cat has retreated close to it, and stands snarling - not at them; at something on the ground, before the fire. There is a very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering suffocating vapour in the room, and a dark greasy coating on the walls and ceiling...'

'Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is - is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he is here! and this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him.

'Help, help, help! come into this house for Heaven's safe!

'Plenty will come in, but none can help. The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name Your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally - inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only - Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.' (BH, Ch. XXXII)

The Krook-Chancellor symbolic design gains its full point here, and Spontaneous Combustion assumes a natural and inevitable aspect. Every rotten system perishes through its own inherent corruption, and so does ultimately the cause, 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce', in Chancery:

'Our suspense was short; for a break-up soon took place in the crowd, and the people came streaming out looking flushed and hot, and bringing a quantity of bad air with them...and presently great bundles of paper began to be carried out - bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes, which the bearer staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow, on the Hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more.' (BH, Ch. LXV)

It is 'all up with' Jarndyce and Jarndyce: its physical

extinction[1] is suggested precisely at the moment when 'the whole estate is found to have been absorbed in costs'. The foul atmosphere attendant on Krook's death gathers over the end of the cause. This point is important. Because just as the confused slow waste of Chancery is reflected in Krook's warehouse, exactly so the unwholesome 'smell' and 'flavour' of the dead at Chesney Wold and the pestiferous air of Tom-all-Alone's and its 'obscene' graveyard foregather in its atmosphere. Thus the sensuous unity which these scenes of action share, essentially emanates from Krook's rag-and-bottle shop. With Tom-all-Alone's crouching over it, it stands like a finger-post, significantly pointing towards Chancery and Bleak House and Chesney Wold.

How consciously this symbolic pattern has been created, can be seen from the way Dickens weaves the strand of social misery into it. Primarily it is Jo the crossing-sweeper, who represents the poor, and it is worth noting how he is placed and manipulated.

Chapter XVI is entitled 'Tom-all-Alone's', and opens with an account of how Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester are faring. She is 'restless, very restless', flitting between town and Chesney Wold where he is yielding up 'his family legs' to the family gout. Before the reader is plunged into the filthy wretchedness of the London slum, Dickens asks:

> 'What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom... What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories

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1. Butt and Tillotson, p. 179:
'Fire will sweep away the confusion of the law, as Spontaneous Combustion disposed of Lord Chancellor Krook.'

> of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together![1]
>
> 'Jo sweeps his crossing all day long, unconscious of the link, if any link there be.' (BH, Ch. XVI)

Obviously this strong note of contrast is struck with great significance, and perhaps the last two sentences also point forward to the dirty churchyard where Captain Hawdon lies buried, and where Jo and Lady Dedlock are eventually to join him. The 'link' suggested here is similar to the one which Carlyle had earlier emphasized: 'The forlorn Irish Widow, disowned by her fellow-creatures, proved her sisterhood; her typhus fever killed <u>them</u>.'[2] This 'connexion' is therefore 'a sure law' by which the heavy miseries pressing, in their rudest shape, 'on the great dumb inarticulate class', spread upwards, 'in a less palpable but not less certain and perhaps still more fatal shape on all classes to the very highest'.[3]

So if there is nothing for Jo but 'moving on', he will move on, spreading the infection he carries with him till he moves on to "the berryin ground", for 'that's the move as I'm up to'. It is in this context that the title, "Stop Him!", of Chapter XLVI should better be considered. Tom-all-Alone's is personified as Tom, and it is time, and in the interests of high and low, that Tom was "stopped":

> 'Darkness rests upon Tom-all-Alone's. Dilating and dilating since the sun went down last night, it has gradually swelled until it fills every void in the place. For a time there were some dungeon lights burning, as the lamp of Life burns in Tom-all-Alone's, heavily, heavily, in the nauseous air, and...
>
> 'Much mighty speech-making there has been, both in and out of Parliament, concerning Tom, and much wrathful disputation how

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1. This idea will recur, in a wider but different sense, as 'Nobody's Fault' in <u>Dorrit</u>, and the images of 'road' and 'traveller' will illustrate it.
2. Thomas Carlyle, <u>Past and Present</u>, III.
3. Thomas Carlyle, 'Model Prisons' (March 1850), <u>Latter-Day Pamphlets</u>.

> Tom shall be got right. Whether he shall be put into the main road by constables, or by beadles, or by bell-ringing, or by force of figures, or by correct principles of tastes, or by high church, or by low church, or by no church... In the midst of which dust and noise, there is but one thing perfectly clear, to wit, that Tom only may and can, or shall and will, be reclaimed according to somebody's theory but nobody's practice. And in the hopeful meantime, Tom goes to perdition head foremost in his old determined spirit.
>
> 'But he has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream...of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge.' (BH, Ch. XLVI)

This extract strongly recalls the one from Carlyle quoted above, and clearly defines the 'connexion' or 'link' subtly suggested in the passage from Chapter XVI also cited above. Slime and pestilential gas, obscenity and degradation, wickedness and brutality are grouped together with a social motive as in Oliver but with far greater clarity and power. The physical merges here in the moral in a way it never did before.

Thus the mud about Chancery, the smell of stagnation and the 'flavour' of the dead around Chesney Wold, the chaotic waste at Mrs. Jellyby's, the confused ruin and the stench of human incineration at Krook's, and the mud and filth and the rot and corruption at St. Albans and Tom-all-Alone's and its wretched 'berryin-ground' are much more than the typical features of each place. None of these various scenes of action stands and lives by itself. They all join to make a perfect artistic unit, and as suggested above, their sensuous harmony draws its

essential sustenance from the observation and sentiment of the Mudfog Papers and Oliver times and the impressions and recollections of the Notes and Chuzzlewit days. But the prospect of Bleak House as a whole is singularly different, and the explanation lies in the masterly handling of the material in the interests of a symbolic organism. The wringing torture, administered at Chancery and contracted through an obsession with material gain, is balanced by the stagnation and decay at Chesney Wold underlined by a secret falsification of emotional life, and the social misery of St. Albans and Tom-all-Alone's exposes the ineffectuality of Puseyistic philanthropy, and explains and predicts the fall of nobility. And, as hinted at earlier, it is Krook's and the dirty little graveyard which reflect the fatal crises lying in wait for the confusion of the Law in Chancery and for the betrayal of the human heart at Chesney Wold, and it is these, again, which serve to co-ordinate the other parts of the setting into a unity of impression.

In Hard Times the stench of natural rot gives place to that of industrial excretion:

> 'Down upon the river that was black and thick with dye, some Coketown boys who were at large...rowed a crazy boat, which made a spumous track upon the water as it jogged along, while every dip of an oar stirred up vile smells.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. I)

The Dover road in the beginning of A Tale of Two Cities has a sense of heaviness about it. The traveller has to make his way through the mire, and 'the hill, and the harness, and the mud, and the mail, are so heavy', that the horses have often to stop:

'With drooping heads and tremulous tails, they mashed their way through the thick mud, floundering and stumbling between whiles, as if they were falling to pieces at the larger joints.' (TTC, Bk. I, Ch. II)

Whereas these touches bring out the bare physical features of the road, the setting of marshes for Great Expectations is very suggestive of the mystery and crime element in its action:

'the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes;' (GE, Ch. I)

This boggy character of the landscape is frequently emphasized. The dialogue of the two convicts which Pip overhears, ends on a similar note, interesting in its inverted repetition:

'A most beastly place. Mudbank, mist, swamp, and work: work, swamp, mist, and mudbank.' (GE, Ch. XXVIII)

And town lends support to the country in this respect. London is wet and muddy:

'It was wretched weather; stormy and wet, stormy and wet; mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets.' (GE, Ch. XXXIX)

Barnard's Inn is a dismal, smelling rot:

'We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses...that I had ever seen. I thought the windows of the sets of chambers...were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled flower-pot, cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift... A frowzy morning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation of Barnard... Thus far my sense of sight; while dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar - rot of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand besides - addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell, and moaned, "Try Barnard's Mixture".' (GE, Ch. XXI)

Pip, assisted by Herbert and Startop, arranges for Magwitch's escape abroad. They work hard, rowing without rest till they are in

surroundings 'like my own marsh country, flat and monotonous, and with a dim horizon':

> 'For now, the last of the fleet of ships was round the last low point we had headed...and some ballast-lighters, shaped like a child's first rude imitation of a boat, lay low in the mud; and a little squat shoal-lighthouse on open piles, stood crippled in the mud on stilts and crutches; and slimy stakes stuck out of the mud, and red landmarks and tidemarks stuck out of the mud, and an old landing-stage and an old roofless building slipped into the mud, and all about us was stagnation and mud.' (GE, Ch. LIV)

The emphasis on the mud image is significant. It well suggests the sticky situation in which the party is. The scene, the tension, the danger of the moment, and the failure of the project the next morning, all seem to be contained and implied in the description.

The slime and ooze in Our Mutual Friend and its natural connexion with crime have already been discussed. The figure of Riderhood in its amphibious setting appears to point back to Quilp in his riverside counting-house. Moreover, the image of the swamp occurs here with the typical Dickensian vehemence. When the Golden Dustman occupies his new house, in great style and attended by his Secretary, a whole host of 'corporate beggars' and 'individual beggars' lays siege to it:

> 'In such a Dismal Swamp does the new house stand, and through it does the Secretary daily struggle breast-high. Not to mention all the people alive who have made inventions that won't act, and all the jobbers who job in all the jobberies jobbed; though these may be regarded as the Alligators of the Dismal Swamp, and are always lying by to drag the Golden Dustman under.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XVII)

The chapter bears the title, 'A Dismal Swamp', and the paragraph above unfolds the scene around a man of wealth. Money and charity and philanthropy stand equally revealed in the sustained metaphor, and perhaps the image of the Alligators of the Swamp here is akin to that

of the Megalosaurus waddling in mud in Bleak House.

It may be clear from the above that, like dust, mud claims Dickens's attention very early in his literary career, and continues to hold it till almost the last. First appearing in the compound image, 'Mudfog', it begins to assert its own right in Oliver and the Curiosity Shop. Then the American tour seems to cut the impression of sticky rot deeper into his sensibility so that not only does the impeding mud of the road impinge on his sight but the stench of decomposition along hot slimy river-banks and in putrefying boggy woods also sharpens his sense of smell by offending it violently. While Chuzzlewit bears the immediate marks of this impact, and Bleak House best represents its imaginative assimilation, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend exhibit its no less important connotations. But what is worth noting here is its ever-expanding meaning and suggestive power. The plain direct satire of The Mudfog Papers and the linking of the moral with the physical in Oliver pass through the putrid furnace of the Notes to make the world of stagnation and decay that is Bleak House. The Valley of Eden in Chuzzlewit is a hotbed of disease, and the name is highly significant in that it reveals how at this stage the biological is passing into the biblical[1] in Dickens. It is like christening the disintegration in plant and, by ironical implication, human life. This process becomes more artistic and imperceptible in Bleak House when the image of 'a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so,

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1. The references to Abel and Cain are fairly frequent and suggestive in Chuzzlewit, Chapter XLVII. See also Chapter VII of Our Mutual Friend, Book IV, which shows Bradley after his murderous attack on Eugene, and which is entitled 'Better to be Abel than Cain'.

waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill' is blended with the image of the muddy face of the earth just after the Deluge in the Notes and Chuzzlewit. However, the more important aspect of the rot in vegetation in these earlier books is that on its strength Dickens has drawn together the strings of telescopic philanthropy and neglected poverty from The Mudfog Papers and Oliver to create an elaborate but concentrated pattern in Bleak House. Chancery, Chesney Wold, Krook's, and Tom-all-Alone's - each is itself, and yet all are one by virtue of a common 'connexion' or 'link'. The physical merges so naturally in the moral and social that the sensuous harmony of the whole hardly breathes of calculation or design. Nevertheless, it is clear that it derives much of its essential sustenance from the earlier writings.

Like the slime and swamp in Oliver, the marshes figure in Great Expectations as a setting for crime and mystery, and the mud appearing in it later is ominous of obstruction in plans as in Bleak House. But there is an important difference. Whereas the evil in Oliver and Great Expectations works through man against man, in Bleak House it works through institution against man, and ironically enough its victims themselves set it in motion. A hope of material gain is linked with Chancery, and the prehistoric mud with the Megalosaurus waddling in it suggests the ancient, interminable and monstrous course of that hope. In a sense Our Mutual Friend seems to reveal the Boffins' new house in the same light as Chancery. It is beleaguered by rapacious beggars, corporate as well as individual, i.e., the Golden Dustman struggles in the Dismal Swamp only to run the risk of being dragged under by Alligators.

It may be clear from the above that both dust and mud stimulate Dickens's mind into imaginative activity. But the mud image goes down deeper into his consciousness. The explanation seems to lie in its more noxious stench when, together with vegetation, it is in an advanced state of corruption. The many trips through the steaming morasses of America appear to have provided Dickens with as many opportunities to see and smell them. The contention is that dust does not, and perhaps cannot, impinge on his sensibility as mud. Again, the dust-heaps in and around London may have a certain sensational value in the matter of topical interest, but the mud in the town streets and suburbs must remain their constant feature. Perhaps there is another and more important aspect of this difference between dust and mud. Dickens has left mud richer than dust, for although he tries to strike the profound note through dust he does not go far beyond its commonplace associations of creation and mortality. He however sets mud in pattern after pattern, all beautifully and originally wrought. One has only to turn to Bleak House to enjoy these touches which are as poetic as symbolic. Perhaps its opening paragraph best shows how the biblico-biological shades of the mud image merge in the realistic detail of everyday life. 'Dust' has not had that sort of sustained favour. Perhaps the only instance of that artistic order is in Our Mutual Friend where the build-up of old Harmon's assets is suggested:

> 'On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. II)

3 - A LONDON PARTICULAR

'"Oh dear no, miss," he said. "This is a London particular."'

- Bleak House

Fog is one of the most important and best-known Dickensian symbols. It seems to have attracted critical attention in the opening of Bleak House, for it is there that it most visibly plays a highly symbolic role. In the earlier work there is not very much of a preparation for this artistic achievement in terms of the fog image itself, although whenever it appears a certain air of significance is seen to gather over it. For instance, in 'Public Life of Mr. Tulrumble' in The Mudfog Papers, the repeated emphasis on 'Mudfog' is not without special meaning: 'Mudfog Hall, Mudfog Hill, Mudfog'. That is where Mr. Tulrumble lives; and he is 'in the habit of indulging abroad in distant and mysterious allusions'. As stated earlier, Dickens satirizes the British Association in the guise of 'Mudfog Association', and groups almost all contemporary endeavour under that suggestive appellation. Thus it is not too much to say that it is the blinding quality of fog which is at the core of this comparison.

Originally set in the town of Mudfog, Oliver shows a glimpse of its features, and Fagin's nocturnal activity is described in their terms:

> 'The mud lay thick upon the stones: and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down: and everything

> felt cold and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it befitted such a thing as the Jew to be abroad.' (OT, Ch. XIX)

A foul-minded, black-hearted criminal should have mud under his feet and mist over his head.

In the Curiosity Shop the baffling, vision-clouding quality of fog has been exploited in the interests of the story. Quilp is enjoying himself alone in his counting-house on the riverside:

> 'The day, in the highest and brightest quarters of the town, was damp, dark, cold, and gloomy. In that low and marshy spot, the fog filled every nook and corner with a thick dense cloud. Every object was obscure at one or two yards' distance. The warning lights and fires upon the river were powerless beneath this pall, and, but for a raw and piercing chillness in the air, and now and then the cry of some bewildered boatman as he rested on his oars and tried to make out where he was, the river itself might have been miles away.
>
> 'The mist, though sluggish and slow to move, was of a keenly searching kind. No muffling up in furs and broadcloth kept it out. It seemed to penetrate into the very bones of the shrinking wayfarers, and to rack them with cold and pains. Everything was wet, and clammy to the touch.' (OCS, Ch. LXVII)

It is on the eve of Quilp's death. Soon after, in a hurry to escape retribution he oversets the stove. The house is in flames, and he rushes out only to be drowned in the river. This death, designed to come as it does, would not be possible if there were no fog to make Quilp lose his way. In fact before this the reader is repeatedly reminded of this obstruction to sight. Mad with rage, Quilp pursues his wife and Tom Scott to the neighbouring lane and gives up the chase, because 'the dense mist which obscured them from his view ...appeared to thicken every moment'. Again, 'reduced to the necessity of groping his way with his hands (it had grown so dark and the fog had so much increased) he returned to his lair'. These

references to the mist are among the mechanical accessories of the plot, for they only contribute to the probability of an incident. However, the appearance of the fog in the Papers and Oliver cannot be dismissed merely as such. Taken together these early descriptions mark perhaps the first step towards the opening of Bleak House: minute detail begins to glimmer under the bold daub in the same Impressionistic style. Besides affecting visibility, the fog impinges on the sense of touch and fills it with repulsion and pain.

There is no suggestive value in the use of the fog around Quilp, unless, of course, the whole matter is studied inversely. Perhaps Dickens believes that an ogrish dwarf like Quilp should die amidst mist and slime and mud. Perhaps the fog constitutes the fittest medium through which to reveal evil, the best garb in which to dress it. Stated thus and studied with the description of Fagin quoted earlier, the position does admit of a symbolic meaning, but it is yet too early for a definite conclusion.

In Chuzzlewit fog appears as a special London feature. Mr. Pecksniff and his daughters, joined in the stage-coach by Anthony and his son, Jonas, arrive in town:

> 'There was a dense fog too - as if it were a city in the clouds, which they had been travelling to all night up a magic beanstalk - and a thick crust upon the pavement like oil-cake; which one of the outsides (mad, no doubt) said to another (his keeper, of course), was snow.' (MC, Ch. VIII)

It figures again when young Martin bids adieu to Mary before leaving for America with Mark Tapley:

> 'It was raw, damp, dark, dismal; the clouds were as muddy as the ground; and the short perspective of every street and avenue, was closed up by the mist as by a filthy curtain.' (MC, Ch. XIV)

The earlier hint that Dickens may be suggesting evil through fog is strengthened by what immediately follows the above lines. Martin soliloquizes:

> 'Fine weather indeed...to be wandering up and down here in, like a thief! Fine weather indeed, for a meeting of lovers in the open air, and in a public walk! I need be departing, with all speed, for another country; for I have come to a pretty pass in this!' (MC, Ch. XIV)

Dickens is very conscious that foul weather should not attend on such a meeting, but he chooses the present conditions for it, because the lover's prospects abroad are to be as depressing and hopeless as at home. Thus 'a filthy curtain of the mist' is just the thing the occasion demands. It not only depicts the present dangers and disappointments of love, but also predicts its future trials and tribulations. That is, it does forebode evil.

In the Carol the figure of Scrooge, busy in his counting-house on Christmas Eve, encourages the above view:

> 'It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal... The City clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: it had not been light all day: and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.'

That is Scrooge the scoffer of Christmas, the enemy of well-being, and this is Scrooge, the convert to the Christmas creed, the seeker of goodwill:

> 'Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping from the blood to dance to; golden sunlight; heavenly sky; sweet air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!'

The fog which envelops Scrooge on Christmas Eve disappears on Christmas Day. His conversion has dispelled the pall of evil around him.

The description of Scrooge in his counting-house recalls that of Quilp in his, and both seem to point forward to that of 'the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery'.

The most obvious fact about fog is that it interposes itself between the eye and the object and increases the distance that separates them. Thus it renders the near remote, wraps up things in mystery, and introduces an air of indefiniteness into the field of perception. And it is this mystifying aspect of it that Dickens exploits in Dombey. Sol Gills of the Wooden Midshipman is depicted as 'looking wistfully at his nephew out of the fog that always seemed to hang about him'. The touch is repeated: 'Some of the fog that hung about old Sol seemed to have got into his throat; for he spoke huskily.' This sense of vague distance about the old man is admirably supported by the nautical instruments lying around him and appears to suggest the long voyages he is to undertake in search of Walter.

In Copperfield the mystifying quality of fog is employed indirectly and metaphorically. David is having 'My First Dissipation'. He entertains Steerforth, Grainger, and Markham to supper at his lodgings and becomes intoxicated. His friends are beside him, but they are 'sitting in a mist, and a long way off'. Then the party goes to the theatre:

> 'A very foggy night, with great rings round the lamps in the streets! There was an indistinct talk of its being wet. I considered it frosty...

> 'A man sitting in a pigeon-hole place, looked out of the fog, and took money from somebody, inquiring if I was one of the gentlemen paid for... Shortly afterwards, we were very high up in a very hot theatre, looking down into a large pit, that seemed to me to smoke; the people with whom it was crammed were so indistinct.' (DC, Ch. XXIV)

A dazed haziness of the senses - that is what the mist stands for when it describes the state of drunkenness.

Two facts emerge from the above. First, Dickens likes to connect fog with evil, and secondly, he is imaginatively conscious of its mystifying quality. And these appear to touch the very threshold of Bleak House, if Carlyle's share in the matter is taken into account. As pointed out by John Butt,[1] it is highly probable that Dickens benefited by the use of the image in Latter-Day Pamphlets:

> 'in the smoke of this universal, and alas indispensable revolutionary fire, and burning up of worn-out rags of which the world is full, our life-atmosphere has (for the time) become one vile London fog, and the eternal loadstars are gone out for us!'[2]

The description opening that novel is a composite pattern of beauty, and its power and excellence derive from the perfect harmony of its component chords. Mud and smoke and fog usher the reader into its stagnant, stuffy, mystifying world and accompany him all along, and it is largely through these images that the imaginative and emotional response evoked in the beginning is sustained till the very end. A reference may here be made to the compound image, 'mudfog', discussed earlier. The 'mudfog' idea appears to fructify fully in Bleak House, because it is here that 'mud' and 'fog' figure together to achieve an artistic ensemble. The 'mud' part of it, introduced

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1. Butt and Tillotson, p. 178.
2. Thomas Carlyle, 'Model Prisons', Latter-Day Pamphlets.

with the very first paragraph of the book, has already been dealt with under a separate head. Here the 'fog' part comes up for discussion, and this is how it is brought into play from the second paragraph onwards:

> 'Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits, and meadows, fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs, fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.
>
> 'Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time - as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.
>
> 'The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.
>
> 'Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.' (BH, Ch. I)

These descriptions are a culmination of the suggestive process which first showed Quilp in his counting-house, and then Scrooge in his. But as fog fills and sweeps the exterior of Chancery, so it penetrates and stuffs its interior. The Lord High Chancellor sits

> 'with a foggy glory round his head...directing his contemplation to the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog;'

> 'the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it, and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank.'
>
> 'Thus, in the midst of the mud and at the heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.' (BH, Ch. I)

That is the **setting** for the High Court of Chancery. Obviously it exhibits the actual features of the place, as approached from outside and as viewed from inside. But it is not difficult to see how physical fact has been charged with symbolic import. Restored to their context two of the above extracts convey the meaning underlying the pattern:

> 'On such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here - as here he is - with a foggy glory round his head... On such an afternoon, some score of members of the High Court of Chancery bar ought to be - as here they are - mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horse-hair warded heads against walls of words, and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. On such an afternoon, the various solicitors in the cause...ought to be - as are they not? - ranged in a line, in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it), between the registrar's red table and the silk gowns, with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them. Well may the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained glass windows lose their colour, and admit no light of day into the place.' (BH, Ch. I)

The words, 'mistily' and 'slippery' hold the key to the problem here. The interminable activity involving the Chancellor, the lawyers, and the solicitors, represents the endeavour of men caught in 'knee-deep' mud and enveloped in dense dark fog; for while 'precedents', 'technicalities', 'rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly

nonsense' are only mud, 'trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretences of all sorts' are but fog. There is no sense of direction, no hope of progress. All is in an impasse.

The first chapter of Bleak House reflects the mood of the entire novel. How this has been achieved cannot be relevantly shown here, but it must be clear that mud and fog contribute most to that end. The 'muddy' course having already been followed, the 'foggy' aspect comes in for discussion here.

Accompanied by Mr. Guppy, Esther is on her way to Lincoln's Inn. The streets are 'so full of dense brown smoke' that scarcely anything is to be seen. She asks him whether there is a great fire anywhere, and he replies: "Oh dear no, miss... This is a London particular." That means, of course, the fog hovering over the precincts of Chancery. Again, he is conducting Esther, Ada, and Rick to Mrs. Jellyby's, and there is a 'very dense' fog. They approach their destination: 'a narrow street of high houses, like an oblong cistern to hold the fog'. Yet again, Miss Flite leads the party to Krook's, and it is 'still foggy and dark', and the shop is 'blinded besides by the wall of Lincoln's Inn'. Krook is 'short, cadaverous, and withered...the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within'. This not only promises 'Spontaneous Combustion' but also recalls the real smoke attendant on the 'mudfog' combination in the first chapter. And atmospheric darkness leaves a deeper impression on 'PEFFER AND SNAGSBY' which stands in 'the shade of Cook's Court, at most times a shady place':

'For smoke, which is the London ivy, had so wreathed itself

round Peffer's name, and clung to his dwelling-place, that the affectionate parasite quite overpowered the parent tree.' (BH, Ch. X)

A mist hovers stealthily about when Mr. Tulkinghorn visits Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock:

'It is now twilight. The fire glows brightly on the panelled wall, and palely on the window-glass, where, through the cold reflection of the blaze, the colder landscape shudders in the wind, and a grey mist creeps along: the only traveller besides the waste of clouds.' (BH, Ch. XII)

Even reminiscent suggestion serves to cloud the imaginative prospect:

'Ada, with her loving face - and if it had seemed innocent and trusting, when I first saw it in that memorable November fog, how much more did it seem now, when I knew her innocent and trusting heart - even Ada shook her head at this.' (BH, Ch. XVII)

A similar effect is achieved when Mr. George asks Phil if he has 'clapped' his eyes on the country, and he answers: "I see 'em, guv'ner. They was flat. And miste." This image of the mist on the marshes is of the same genre as 'Mudfog' of the Oliver days and points forward to the country setting of Great Expectations.

Mists lurk about Chesney Wold again: 'Howls the shrill wind round Chesney Wold; the sharp rain beats, the windows rattle, and the chimneys growl. Mists hide in the avenues, veil the points of view, and move in funeral-wise across the rising grounds.' (BH, Ch. XXIX)

Esther and Charley arrive in Deal to see Richard: 'At last we came into the narrow streets of Deal: and very gloomy they were, upon a raw misty morning... The sea was heaving under a thick white fog;' (BH, Ch. XLV)

Mrs. Rouncewell and Mrs. Bagnet journey to London to help George

who is in jail: 'The frosty night wears away, and the dawn breaks, and the post-chaise comes rolling on through the early mist, like the ghost of a chaise departed.' (BH, Ch. LV)

Lady Dedlock disappears, and the search party posts up and down the country roads in wind and snow and sleet: 'The sleet fell all that day unceasingly, a thick mist came on early, and it never rose or lightened for a moment.' (BH, Ch. LVII)

Later at Chesney Wold

> 'The day is now beginning to decline. The mist and the sleet into which the snow has all resolved itself, are darker, and the blaze begins to tell more vividly upon the room walls and furniture.' (BH, Ch. LVIII)

These extracts give an idea of the faint visibility that Bleak House offers. In fact the sky lowers upon its world continually so that even at its brightest the atmosphere is one of half-lights. Obviously what is most responsible for the day's 'dim London eye' is the 'London particular', fog. And, what is more, there lie under its thick pall, Chancery, Mrs. Jellyby's, Mr. Krook's, Mr. Snagsby's and Chesney Wold in a common darkness - the darkness of delusion. An endless hope of material gain, a mistaken enthusiasm for philanthropy, a liking for drunken confusion, a passion for secretiveness and detection, a preference of social pride to truth of heart - all are delusion. But Chancery encourages delusion in its most prevalent and destructive form, and hence 'the dense fog is densest' around it, and 'at the heart of the fog' sits the Lord High Chancellor. Looking back upon Quilp or Scrooge in his counting-house, one may well arrive at the conclusion that Dickens connects fog with evil, for delusion causes waste, and hence is evil. This is how Chancery becomes the most

hideous instrument of evil.

The lure of material gain that consumes generation after generation of suitors in 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce', blinds them to their sure doom. The cause is a living legend. While Tom Jarndyce represents its past glory, Mr. Gridley and Miss Flite exhibit its present grandeur. However, Rick is the latest and most elaborate emblem of its perennial power. He is a talented young man but cannot stick to anything. He goes in for Law, Medicine and Army, but fails successively. Then, well knowing the dreadful fate of old Tom Jarndyce, and fully seeing the sad plight of Miss Flite and Mr. Gridley, he enters Chancery as an active suitor. He is ground down in its slow but sure mill and dies soon after the cause is finally closed, because the whole estate has been swallowed up in costs. It is interesting to note how Dickens depicts the tragic course Rick has taken.

Esther refers to his estrangement from John Jarndyce which the Chancery suit has caused: "Dear, unfortunate, mistaken Richard... When will he awake from his delusion!" And her guardian meets the point in almost similar terms: "I now particularly beg of you, my dear, not to move this subject with Rick. Let it rest. Next week, next month, next year, sooner or later, he will see me with clearer eyes. I can wait."

Then when 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce' ends hopelessly, Rick has his mouth full of blood in the Court and is brought home by Allan. John Jarndyce goes to see him and lays his hand on his:

> '"O sir," said Richard, "you are a good man, you are a good man!" and burst into tears for the first time.'

And his guardian says:

> "My dear Rick...the clouds have cleared away, and it is bright now. We can see now. We were all bewildered, Rick, more or less,..."

Ominously enough, these are almost Rick's last words:

> "When shall I go from this place, to that pleasant country where the old times are...where I shall be able to recall my many faults and blindnesses..." (BH, Ch. LXV)

Thus if the delusion of a solicitor is not to be dispelled except within sight of the grave, the dense fog needs must be densest in and around Chancery, and the Lord High Chancellor needs must sit in the very heart of it. The lure of material gain is the strongest of all, and Chancery prolongs its span interminably. 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce', which combines human motive with legal procedure, is

> 'Unreason and injustice at the top, unreason and injustice at the heart and at the bottom, unreason and injustice from beginning to end - if it ever has an end.' (BH, Ch. LX)

Reason cannot function here, and the sense of right and wrong has no scope. It is a complete and incurable jaundice of vision that plagues the suitors at Chancery. But as indicated earlier, the fog vitiates the whole atmosphere of Bleak House, and that suggests the acquisitive activity of Victorian society in particular and the deluded tone of human endeavour in general. It is in fact a process of confused conflict among men that Dickens thus reveals. There are many parasites and their many more hosts and a few good souls, powerless to destroy the parasites or save the hosts. There are official parasites like the Lord High Chancellor, social parasites like Smallweed, religious parasites like Chadband, family parasites like Turveydrop, professional parasites like Vholes, and amateurish parasites like Skimpole. There are political parasites of all the patterns of Boodle

and Buffy who shelter these insects and worms of prey. Then there are philanthropic busy drones like Mrs. Jellyby and charitable virtuous wasps like Mrs. Pardiggle. Those who, like Smallweed, thrive on the blood of their kind, have a spider-like ancestry and a monkey-owlish progeny, and those who, like Prince and Caddy, dare to live through labour and sacrifice, can bring forth only a deaf and dumb worm-like mammal. The biological note struck in the opening mud description gets greater depth and puts on a new significance.

Bleak House marks a departure from almost everything preceding it in that the conception of villainy has passed from the human to the institutional. There is here no Fagin, Quilp, or Carker who can stalk the stage or overawe the scene. What does the villain's job is the mud-girt, befogged High Court of Chancery. This is the dark veil that draws itself between friend and friend, and this is the instrument of doom that sets man on man and man on himself. This is the cage that confines Youth and Age and Hope and Life, and here do Fates spin yarn and play dice, again and again till Judgment Day.

Thus the all-pervading fog constitutes the medium which unites all, as well as the screen which separates all. It combines in itself the confounding slow torture of legal machinery and the blinding lure of material gain which sets and keeps it in motion, because this it is that divides men into hosts and parasites and brings about a universal rot. So powerful and mysterious is this lure that high and low and young and old, all succumb to it, together and singly. If by happy chance or sad example one, like John Jarndyce, knows the dread secret, he can at best save himself; he cannot avert the doom gathering over the heads of others. Either an utter

loneliness of suffering, or an utter helplessness of goodwill - there is no third way. Herein lie the cruel mystery and the tragic irony of life. This is how the contemporary situation crystallizes in Dickens's vision, and this is how the fog, 'a London particular' becomes a Victorian essential, or even a human imperative.

The 'Mudfog' image recurs in A Tale of Two Cities when its story opens on the Dover road. The horses mash their way through the thick mud:

> 'There was a steaming mist in all the hollows, and it had roamed in its forlornness up the hill, like an evil spirit, seeking rest and finding none. A clammy and intensely cold mist, it made its slow way through the air in ripples that visibly followed and overspread one another, as the waves of an unwholesome sea might do. It was dense enough to shut out everything from the light of the coach-lamps but these its own workings, and a few yards of road; and the reek of the labouring horses steamed into it, as if they had made it all.' (TTC, Ch. II)

The appearance of the fog here is significant in so far as it creates an atmosphere for the enigmatic news, 'RECALLED TO LIFE', about Doctor Manette. Its comparison to 'an evil spirit' is also important, for it confirms its connexion with evil as emphasized earlier. There is another suggestive touch that directly interprets the symbolic setting of Chancery in Bleak House. After a labour of many successive nights Sydney Carton makes a grand clearance among Mr. Stryver's papers before the setting in of the long vacation:

> 'everything was got rid of until November should come with its fogs atmospheric and fogs legal, and bring grist to the mill again.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. XI)

While the fog image appears in a rather explanatory sense in the Tale, it takes on a highly symbolic role in Great Expectations. The

setting of mist and marshes is most proper to a story of mystery and crime, because it is only a variation on the 'Mudfog' idea which Dickens almost invariably associates with the confounding, secret ways of evil.

It is at the old Battery on 'th' meshes' that Pip has a rendezvous with Magwitch. He steals 'wittles' from the pantry and runs for 'the misty marshes':

> 'Now I saw the damp lying on the bare hedges and spare grass, like a coarser sort of spiders' webs; hanging itself from twig to twig and blade to blade. On every rail and gate, wet lay clammy, and the marsh-mist was so thick, that the wooden finger on the post directing people to our village...was invisible to me until I was close under it.' (GE, Ch. III)

This feature of the landscape eventually comes to mirror the rise and fall of Pip's fortunes.

Pip leaves his country home for London and breaks into tears when saying good-bye to Joe. Then he gets into the coach and after a while feels composed: 'And the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me.'

This coincides with the end of the first stage of Pip's expectations, and the significance of the mists is clear enough.

Then his sister dies, and he comes to attend the funeral. Later he assures Biddy that he will come down often to see Joe, but she asks him if he is quite sure of that. He feels hurt and tells her so at the time of farewell:

> 'Once more, the mists were rising as I walked away. If they disclosed to me, as I suspect they did, that I should <u>not</u> come back, and that Biddy was quite right, all I can say is - they were quite right too.' (GE, Ch. XXXV)

The mists not only indicate the course of his worldly affairs, but also show the trend of his moral sense in the domain of family

affections.

Again, after Magwitch is dead, and his 'portable property' gone, Pip is laid up with a delirious illness. Joe takes care of him, and he recovers his strength:

> 'But whether Joe knew how poor I was, and how my great expectations had all dissolved, like our own marsh mists before the sun, I could not understand.' (GE, Ch. LVII)

Finally in Chapter LIX - the last - Pip goes to see Joe and Biddy after eleven years, and in the evening before dark he walks over to the old spot where Miss Havisham's house once stood. Nothing has been left but the old garden which he enters:

> 'A cold silvery mist had veiled the afternoon, and the moon was not yet up to scatter it. But the stars were shining beyond the mist, and the moon was coming, and the evening was not dark.'

Pip meets Estella there. They begin to talk of old times, and the moon begins to rise:

> 'The silvery mist was touched with the first rays of the moonlight, and the same rays touched the tears that dropped from her eyes.'

And then hand in hand they walk back from the ruined place:

> 'as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.'

Rising with the rising moon, the mists here forecast the future settled course of Pip's emotional life.

It may be interesting to note that the mist not only forms here a suitable background for a story of crime and mystery but also suggests at every strategic point the way Pip's worldly hopes, his family affections, or his emotional fortunes are going to rise or fall. Dickens seems to assign to it a 'barometric' role.

Chapter I of Book III in Our Mutual Friend opens with a description of a foggy day in London:

> 'It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither. Gaslights flared in the shops with a haggard and unblest air, as knowing themselves to be night-creatures that had no business abroad under the sun; while the sun itself, when it was for a few moments dimly indicated through circling eddies of fog, showed as if it had gone out, and were collapsing flat and cold. Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City - which call Saint Mary Axe - it was rusty-black. From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard; but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh.
>
> 'At nine o'clock on such a morning, the place of business of Pubsey and Co. was not the liveliest object even in Saint Mary Axe - which is not a very lively spot - with a sobbing gaslight in the counting-house window, and a burglarious stream of fog creeping in to strangle it through the keyhole of the main door.'

The above may be placed beside the three important descriptions quoted earlier from the Curiosity Shop, the Carol, and Bleak House. Quilp, Scrooge, the Lord High Chancellor, and Fascination Fledgeby appear in similar environs. The counting-house is as befogged as Chancery, because each is a 'place of business', and because in Dickens's eyes money-making is the most blinding aspect of human activity.

In Chapter III of 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', published in the 1865 Christmas Number of All the Year Round, the Old Court is

shown in the manner of 'Criminal Courts' in the Sketches but, like Chancery in Bleak House, filled with 'a dense brown fog' which becomes 'positively black and in the last degree oppressive East of Temple Bar'. There is a heavy 'cloud of fog and breath' inside the Court, and there is 'the black vapour hanging like a murky curtain outside the great windows'. This atmosphere is perhaps ominous of the death sentence the Murderer is going to get.

The fog image appears significantly in Edwin Drood. One December afternoon it fills Staple Inn, and 'candles shed murky and blurred rays through the windows', and the mysterious inscription

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presented over the ugly portal of the quadrangle looks all the more mysterious. Mr. Grewgious sits writing by his fire, and his clerk, Mr. Bazzard, announces Edwin who comes in choking and says that the fog makes his eyes smart, 'like Cayenne pepper'. Later, dinner is being brought from the hotel in Furnival's, and the fog enters the chamber every time the clerk, 'the immovable waiter', or 'the flying waiter' comes in or goes out. And as the fog has been 'the proximate cause of this sumptuous repast', so it serves for 'its general sauce': 'To hear the out-door clerks sneezing, wheezing, and beating their feet on the gravel was a zest...'

Dickens creates here an unusual effect of humour and mystery. The observation about the flying waiter's leg - always preceding himself and tray by some seconds and always lingering after he and the

tray have disappeared - is connected with the allusion to Macbeth's leg 'when accompanying off the stage with reluctance to the assassination of Duncan'. The fog in this pattern tends to introduce an element of evil foreboding into the conversation of Mr. Grewgious and Edwin. The wedding-ring that is almost the centre of interest in the present scene, is probably meant to travel far into Edwin's dark fate.

It may be clear from the above that in Dickens's work fog is much more than an impurity of the atmosphere. It can attend on evil, personal as well as institutional, - personal in the case of Quilp, for instance, and institutional in that of Chancery. It can stand for any confounding activity like the legal proceedings in Lincoln's Inn Hall. It can suggest a mystifying influence which steals upon minds like Rick's, driving them to destruction against their own better judgment. It can represent that deluded quality of human enthusiasm which loses all sense of proportion and becomes an obsession, as in Mrs. Jellyby. It can foreshadow the trials and hardships lying in the distant future, as for young Martin and old Sol. It can be a fit medium to usher in mystery and crime and punishment, as in the Tale, Great Expectations, and Doctor Marigold. It can rise and fall like a curtain predicting the coming state of material interests and of personal affections, as in the life of Pip. And it can augment the mystery of an atmosphere by charging it with dark forebodings as in Drood. In fact it symbolizes evil as it bedevils men's minds and hearts with all its attendant influences, baffling and elusive, present and remote.

Fog is a serious but silent disturbance of the atmosphere and, presumably on that account, Dickens generally exploits it for slow, stealthy and mysterious effects.[1] It may be interesting to see what artistic capital he makes out of a violent disturbance like a storm.

In 'The Bagman's Story' in Pickwick there is a graphic account of a rain-storm which hits Tom Smart's bay mare and gig on Marlborough Downs. Then there bursts a thunderstorm over Mr. Pickwick's head when he is on his nightly watch in the garden to intercept the alleged plans of Mr. Jingle for enticing a girl from the boarding-school. In these instances the storm no doubt adds a little of excitement to the situation, but it does nothing more.

In Oliver, however, it does bear a significance. The clouds seem 'to presage a violent thunderstorm' on the night when Mr. and Mrs. Bumble hasten to keep their appointment with Monks. The three schemers are in a ruinous house to transact their dark business in regard to Oliver,

> 'when a bright flash of lightning streamed down the aperture, and a peal of thunder followed, which shook the crazy building to its centre.' (OT, Ch. XXXVIII)

A conspiracy against right and blood - Monks is in reality Edward Leeford, a half-brother of Oliver - should find an echo in nature. That is what Dickens seems to suggest.

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1. Snow, which usually falls gently and silently, has been put to a similar use. In the Curiosity Shop when Kit and party are about to arrive in the old church, the wind dies away, and it comes on to snow. This is a preparation for the scene of Little Nell's death. In Bleak House it serves to deepen the mystery of Lady Dedlock's flight. However, in Our Mutual Friend and in No Thoroughfare it forms a heartless, white background proper to murder.

In the Curiosity Shop the storm becomes clearly ominous. Little Nell is doing well as Mrs. Jarley's little assistant, and her grandfather is almost settled down to a reformed course of life, when 'one holiday night' they go out for a walk:

> 'It had been gradually getting overcast, and now the sky was dark and lowering, save where the glory of the departing sun piled up masses of gold and burning fire, decaying embers of which gleamed here and there through the black veil, and shone redly down upon the earth. The wind began to moan in hollow murmurs, as the sun went down carrying glad day elsewhere; and a train of dull clouds coming up against it, menaced thunder and lightning. Large drops of rain soon began to fall, and, as the storm clouds came sailing onward, others supplied the void they left behind and spread over all the sky. Then was heard the low rumbling of distant thunder, then the lightning quivered, and then the darkness of an hour seemed to have gathered in an instant.' (OCS, Ch. XXIX)

'Drenched with the pelting rain, confused by the deafening thunder, and bewildered by the glare of the forked lightning', they take shelter in 'a solitary house'. There, in the company of the three gamblers, temptation overpowers the old man, and he takes his seat at the gaming table once again.

This incident is highly important. Now Nell's faith in life is completely shaken, and she leads the old man farther and farther away from the abodes of men, ultimately to enter the sanctuary of an ancient church. Thus the storm signifies for them the failure of all hopes of earthly betterment.

Again, the state of tension and expectation in Little Nell's friends is heightened by the fury of wind and rain they have to face on the road. In the description of the journey there is an important hint:

> 'There was a freedom and freshness in the wind, as it came howling by... As it swept on with its cloud of frost, bearing d own the dry twigs and boughs and withered leaves, and carrying

> them away pell-mell, it seemed as though some general sympathy had got abroad, and everything was in a hurry like themselves.' (OCS, Ch. LXIX)

It is clear, especially from the last two clauses, that Dickens employs atmospheric abnormalities consciously and for calculated effect. But in Barnaby he formulates his view more clearly and explicitly:

> 'There are times when, the elements being in unusual commotion, those who are bent on daring enterprises, or agitated by great thoughts whether of good or evil, feel a mysterious sympathy with the tumult of nature and are roused into corresponding violence. In the midst of thundering, lightning, and storm, many tremendous deeds have been committed; men self-possessed before, have given a sudden loose to passions they could no longer control. The demons of wrath and despair have striven to emulate those who ride the whirlwind and direct the storm; and man, lashed into madness with the roaring winds and boiling waters, has become for the time as wild and merciless as the elements themselves.' (BR, Ch. II)

Thus the tumult or peace of the elements refers to the commotion or calm of the human mind. That is, in art the character and action of man are to be connected with the mood and behaviour of nature. As suggested earlier in the Introduction, this connexion can best manifest itself in setting and background.

Mr. Dombey's coldness and Paul's christening are depicted according to the above formula. In all his life, Mr. Dombey had never made a friend:

> 'His cold and distant nature had neither sought one, nor found one. And now, when that nature concentrated its whole force so strongly on a partial scheme of parental interest and ambition, it seemed as if its icy current, instead of being released by this influence, and running clear and free, had thawed for but an instant to admit its burden, and then frozen with it into one unyielding block.' (DS, Ch. V)

Paul's christening day arrives:

> 'It happened to be an iron-grey autumnal day, with a shrewd east wind blowing - a day in keeping with the proceedings. Mr. Dombey represented in himself the wind, the shade, and the autumn of the christening. He stood in his library to receive the company, as hard and cold as the weather; and when he looked out through the glass room, at the trees in the little garden, their brown and yellow leaves came fluttering down, as if he blighted them.'

The chilly atmosphere and the cold man and the solemn ceremony are all in unison. In fact the season, the weather, the day, and the occasion, all originate in Mr. Dombey so that the pattern is a blend of nature, man, and ritual.

Paul dies, and Florence one night goes to her father's room to seek his affection and sympathy, but he tells her that the whole house is hers above there:

> 'Let him remember it in that room, years to come. The rain that falls upon the roof: the wind that mourns outside the door: may have foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!' (DS, Ch. VIII)

The rain and the wind are not only significant features of the present moment; they are also portents of the distant future. Years later, when 'his baby-hope, his wife, his friend, his fortune', one by one, fall away from Mr. Dombey, the touch returns with repeated emphasis:

> 'And the ruined man. How does he pass the hours, alone?
>
> '"Let him remember it in that room, years to come!" He did remember it. It was heavy on his mind now; heavier than all the rest.
>
> '"Let him remember it in that room, years to come. The rain that falls upon the roof, the wind that mourns outside the door, may have foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!"
>
> 'He did remember it. In the miserable night he thought of it; in the dreary day, the wretched dawn, the ghostly, memory-

haunted twilight. He did remember it.'

> 'Oh! He did remember it! The rain that fell upon the roof, the wind that mourned outside the door that night, had had foreknowledge in their melancholy sound.' (DS, Ch. LIX)

This ominous and secret minstrelsy which an elemental disturbance performs, is perhaps best achieved in Bleak House. The rain contributes a lot to the sense of slow corrosion which is the very breath of its world:

> 'The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground, for half a mile in breadth, is a stagnant river, with melancholy trees for islands in it, and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain. The view from my Lady Dedlock's own windows is alternately a lead-coloured view and a view in Indian ink. The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day, and the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called from old time, the Ghost's Walk, all night.' (BH, Ch. II)

The rain here has as much 'foreknowledge' as in Dombey, only its meaning is wider and more implicit and complex. It lays the basis for the images like 'the opening of floodgates' which depict the imminence of social change, and it creates a sense of constant individual suffering. It is remarkable that by interposing the vases between the rain and the pavement Dickens suggests the continuous erosion that is Lady Dedlock's emotional lot, and it is worth noting again that the 'drip, drip,' tone is in keeping with the slow-grinding torture administered by Chancery to its victims.

In Hard Times the commotion in nature does not bear any deep significance. It only serves to quicken the tempo of action. One 'overcast September evening, just at nightfall', urged on by her

spying and spiteful nature Mrs. Sparsit manages to overhear Louisa and Harthouse in the woods:

> 'They both started. The listener started, guiltily, too; for she thought there was another listener among the trees. It was only rain, beginning to fall fast in heavy drops.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. XII)

She hastens back without any clear idea of their plans:

> 'in the whirl of her own gratified malice, in the dread of being discovered, in the rapidly increasing noise of heavy rain among the leaves, and a thunder-storm rolling up - Mrs. Sparsit... set off with...an unavoidable halo of confusion and indistinctness.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. XII)

Then in all haste she follows Louisa to the railway station:

> 'Louisa sat waiting in a corner. Mrs. Sparsit sat waiting in another corner. Both listened to the thunder, which was loud, and to the rain, as it washed off the roof, and pattered on the parapets of the arches. Two or three lamps were rained out and blown out; so both saw the lightning to advantage as it quivered and zigzagged on the iron tracks.' (Ibid.)

The train arrives and leaves the little station, 'a desert speck in the thunder-storm', and the prospect ahead is no different:

> 'The tremendous rain occasioned infinite confusion, when the train stopped at its destination. Gutters and pipes had burst, drains had overflowed, and streets were under water.' (Ibid.)

Mrs. Sparsit is in a sad plight. 'Wet through and through' she bursts into tears of bitterness, because she has lost track of Louisa.

Thus the rain and the thunder-storm introduce confusion into the eaves-dropping atmosphere, whip up the excitement of the pursuit, and prepare the way for Mrs. Sparsit's total discomfiture later. In other words, they are primarily brought to bear upon the plot of the novel at an important stage. Besides, they heighten the pitch of Louisa's sensibility which Harthouse's passion has awakened from its repressed state, and enable her to take her big decision to break up her indifferent home. In this light they also assume an ominous

aspect, for they mark a major change in the life of some principal characters in the book.

The Tale presents perhaps the best symbolic use of the storm. Dickens appears to weave into pattern the very spirit of his observations in Barnaby, and into its execution has gone all the artistic excellence the years of his maturity have brought.

Doctor Manette's lodgings are 'in a quiet street-corner not far from Soho-square'. It is 'a cool spot', 'a wonderful place for echoes', and there, one oppressive night, the Doctor, Lucie and Mr. Lorry are hearing from Mr. Darnay the 'curious thing' he had been told in the Tower of London about a prisoner. The story, very suggestive of his own, startles the Doctor, but he explains away his embarrassment: "They are large drops of rain falling and they made me start." The party moves indoors, and Sydney Carton lounges in. The thunder-gusts whirl into the corner, and the Doctor says, "The rain-drops are still falling large, heavy, and few... It comes slowly," and Carton remarks, "It comes surely":

> 'They spoke low, as people watching and waiting mostly do; as people in a dark room, watching and waiting for Lightning, always do.
>
> 'There was a great hurry in the streets of people speeding away to get shelter before the storm broke; the wonderful corner for echoes resounded with the echoes of footsteps coming and going, yet not a footstep was there.'
>
> 'The footsteps were incessant, and the hurry of them became more and more rapid. The corner echoed and re-echoed with the tread of feet; some, as it seemed, under the windows; some, as it seemed, in the room; some coming, some going, some breaking off, some stopping altogether; all in the distant streets, and not one within sight.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. VI)

As Darnay insists, Lucie discloses her 'foolish fancy' about the

footsteps, and Carton measures it each time with his own. She says: "I have sometimes sat alone here of an evening, listening, until I have made the echoes out to be the echoes of all the footsteps that are coming by-and-bye into our lives." And Carton moodily strikes in, "There is a great crowd coming one day into our lives, if that be so."

Lucie further explains for the doubting Darnay, "I have imagined them the footsteps of the people who are to come into my life, and my father's." And Carton again says, "I take them into mine!... I ask no questions and make no stipulations. There is a great crowd bearing down upon us, Miss Manette, and I see them - by the Lightning." He adds the last three words after there has been 'a vivid flash', and he adds again, 'after a peal of thunder':

> '"And I hear them!... Here they come, fast, fierce, and furious!"
>
> 'It was the rush and roar of rain that he typified, and it stopped him, for no voice could be heard in it. A memorable storm of thunder and lightning broke with that sweep of water, and there was not a moment's interval in crash, and fire, and rain, until after the moon rose at midnight.' (Ibid.)

It is not difficult to see how the whole symbolic pattern has been developed to a climax. The faint echoes of footsteps[1] ultimately blend with the 'rush and roar of rain' and the 'storm of thunder and lightning'. And the process continues till the end while all along the meaning of the echoes grows, and their significance deepens and expands. They imply the changes that time brings: 'Lucie sat in the still house in the tranquilly resounding corner, listening to the echoing footsteps of years.' They stir her heart with fluttering

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1. The 'footsteps', 'footprints', 'footmarks' in Ch. LIX of Dombey, and the echoes in Ch. LXVI of Bleak House are perhaps the beginnings of the exquisite sound effects in the Tale.

motherly hopes and fears: they whisper a little daughter's coming as well as a little boy's passing. But whereas the echoes rarely answer to 'the actual tread' of Sydney Carton,

> 'there were other echoes, from a distance, that rumbled menacingly in the corner all through this time. And...they began to have an awful sound, as of a great storm in France with a dreadful sea rising.'
>
> 'Headlong, mad, and dangerous footsteps to force their way into anybody's life, footsteps not easily made clean again if once stained red, the footsteps raging in Saint Antoine afar off, as the little circle sat in the dark London window.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. XXI)

How imperceptibly colour has been added here to sound! And that, too, at its original and repetitive source, the footstep. The whole course of a bloody revolution is telescoped into the image. This is Dickens at his best indeed!

The connexion between the echoes and the storm is sustained throughout. In Chapter VI of Book II the footsteps are first heard a little before the storm, and in Chapter XXI they become in the words of Mr. Lorry, 'very numerous and very loud'. Then Book III, which depicts the climax of the terrible drama, is called 'The track of a storm' and the denouement ends when 'The footsteps die for ever', and that is the last chapter.

Thus the echoes are the distant rumblings of a storm that is to sweep the length and breadth of France and incidentally to gather over the heads of Doctor Manette and the Darnays. In the spirit of his words about the footsteps, "I take them into mine," Sydney Carton chooses to meet the fury of this storm for their sake. The mystery that has muffled the sound of his 'actual tread' all along, resolves itself, and in the decision he takes he indeed typifies 'the rush and roar' of the elements. But the dark and dreadful gate he has to pass

through, opens the way for his soul's eternal glory,

> 'to the calm that must follow all storms - emblem to humanity, of the rest and silence into which the storm called Life must hush at last' (TTC, Bk. I, Ch. VI)

And rightly 'They said of him, about the city that night, that it was the peacefullest man's face ever beheld there.' (TTC, Bk. III, Ch. XV)

The echoes are a very special atmospheric feature in the Tale. Linked to the storm at an early stage, they keep the reader's mind on tenterhooks, but in a gentle and tickling way, and later raise up a holocaust before him. Dickens's visual sense is perhaps his most distinctive quality, but it is clear from the above that he appeals as powerfully to the ear as to the eye. The beautiful sound-image, advancing and receding with the footsteps, weaves a magic web of imminence, and a sense of impending fate looms over the whole imaginative prospect. Nothing could heighten the reader's sense of curiosity more than these periodic pin-pricks of sound.

The handling of the storm in the Tale further confirms the finding that it is a portent of evil. It may in general imply a state of turmoil and agitation, but as a commotion in nature it particularly signifies a great and serious disorder in life, individual or collective.

In Great Expectations, again, the storm figures significantly. Estella won over by Drummle, and Herbert away in Marseilles on business, Pip lies low and alone in the Garden-court chambers:

> 'It was wretched weather; stormy and wet, stormy and wet; mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets. Day after day, a vast heavy veil had been driving over London from the East, and it drove still, as if in the East there were an eternity of cloud and wind. So furious had been the gusts, that high buildings

> in town had had the lead stripped off their roofs; and in the country, trees had been torn up, and sails of windmills carried away; and gloomy accounts had come in from the coast, of shipwreck and death. Violent blasts of rain had accompanied these rages of wind, and the day just closed as I sat down to read had been the worst of all.'
>
> 'We lived at the top of the last house, and the wind rushing up the river shook the house that night, like discharges of cannon, or breakings of a sea. When the rain came with it and dashed against the windows, I thought...that I might have fancied myself in a storm-beaten light-house... I saw that the lamps in the court were blown out, and that the lamps on the bridges and the shore were shuddering, and that the coal fires in barges on the river were being carried away before the wind like red-hot splashes in the rain.' (GE, Ch. XXXIX)

It is in such weather and on such a night that Magwitch the prisoner, felon and bondsman from abroad stumbles up the staircase to 'explain his business to Pip', and this explanation completes Pip's ruin. To his defeat in love is added the shame of his 'made-up' gentility as well as the failure of his worldly expectations. The tumult of the elements is thus ominous of the disorder in the hero's life.

In Our Mutual Friend also the storm appears as a symbol of evil and suffering. Riderhood accuses Hexam of the Harmon murder and leads out Lightwood and Wrayburn to track his rival in 'the hard implacable weather and the rough wind':

> 'He went on before them as an ugly Fate might have done... There came, when they were about midway on their journey, a heavy rush of hail, which in a few minutes pelted the streets clear, and whitened them...
>
> 'The blast went by, and the moon contended with the fast-flying clouds, and the wild disorder reigning up there made the pitiful little tumults in the streets of no account. It was not that the wind swept all the brawlers into places of shelter, as it had swept the hail still lingering in heaps wherever there was refuge for it; but that it seemed as if the streets were absorbed by the sky, and the night were all in the air.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XII)

Later with 'Mr. Inspector' at their side, they find Hexam dead:

> 'Soon, the form of the bird of prey, dead some hours, lay stretched upon the shore, with a new blast storming at it and clothing the wet hair with hailstones.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XIV)

The hail-storm here is clearly suggestive of the villainous character and purpose of Riderhood as well as the death of Hexam and its prolonged blighting shadow on Lizzie's life.

Dickens resorts to the use of the storm again. He depicts through it Bradley's jealous reaction to a meeting between Eugene and Lizzie up beyond Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock which Riderhood keeps:

> 'The second day was sultry and oppressive. In the afternoon, a thunderstorm came up, and had but nearly broken into a furious sweep of rain when he rushed in at the door, like the storm itself.' (OMF, Bk. IV, Ch. I)

As he talks with Riderhood, suddenly 'a great spirt of blood' bursts from his nose. He goes into 'the pelting rain' and washes it away with the river water. Then he lies down to sleep in the truckle bed while Riderhood observes him carefully:

> 'The thunder rolled heavily, and the forked lightning seemed to make jagged rents in every part of the vast curtain without, as Riderhood sat by the window, glancing at the bed. Sometimes he saw the man upon the bed, by a red light; sometimes by a blue; sometimes he scarcely saw him in the darkness of the storm; sometimes he saw nothing of him in the blinding glare of palpitating white fire. Anon the rain would come again with a tremendous rush, and the river would seem to rise to meet it, and a blast of wind, bursting upon the door, would flutter the hair and dress of the man, as if invisible messengers were come around the bed to carry him away. From all these phases of the storm, Riderhood would turn, as if they were interruptions - rather striking interruptions possibly, but interruptions still - of his scrutiny of the sleeper.' (Ibid.)

The 'great spirt of blood' bursting from Bradley's nose shows the fury of the storm raging within him, and this mingling of the blood in the river water when there is such a commotion in nature, perhaps

foreshadows another that is to follow the murderous assault on Eugene, and yet another that is to result from the fall of Bradley and Riderhood into the lock.

The description of the storm in Drood is perhaps the most poetic of all. Cloisterham is hit by 'a boisterous gale' on Christmas Eve, and Edwin goes down to the river, with Neville, to look at it:

> 'The red light burns steadily all the evening in the light-house on the margin of the tide of busy life. Softened sounds and hum of traffic pass it and flow on irregularly into the lonely Precincts; but very little else goes by, save violent rushes of wind. It comes on to blow a boisterous gale.
>
> 'The Precincts are never particularly well lighted; but the strong blasts of wind blowing out many of the lamps (in some instances shattering the frames too, and bringing the glass rattling to the ground), they are unusually dark to-night. The darkness is augmented and confused, by flying dust from the earth, dry twigs from the trees, and great ragged fragments from the rooks' nests up in the tower. The trees themselves so toss and creak, as this tangible part of the darkness madly whirls about, that they seem in peril of being torn out of the earth: while ever and again a crack, and a rushing fall, denote that some large branch has yielded to the storm.
>
> 'No such power of wind has blown for many a winter-night. Chimneys topple in the streets, and people hold to posts and corners, and to one another, to keep themselves upon their feet. The violent rushes abate not, but increase in frequency and fury until at midnight, when the streets are empty, the storm goes thundering along them, rattling at all the latches, and tearing at all the shutters, as if warning the people to get up and fly with it, rather than have the roofs brought down upon their brains.
>
> 'Still, the red light burns steadily. Nothing is steady but the red light.
>
> 'All through the night the wind blows, and abates not. But early in the morning, when there is barely enough light in the east to dim the stars, it begins to lull. From that time, with occasional wild charges, like a wounded monster dying, it drops and sinks; and at full daylight it is dead.
>
> 'It is then seen that the hands of the Cathedral clock are torn off; that lead from the roof has been stripped away, rolled up, and blown into the Close; and that some stones have been displaced upon the summit of the great tower.' (MED, Ch. XIV)

Even if nothing else could tell Edwin's fate, this extract should. Such a commotion in nature, such a tumult of the elements, and on Christmas Eve, can only portend the gravest of sins and most heinous of crimes, i.e., murder, and perhaps also the murder of a blood-tie and a trust.

The description of the storm in Drood seems to recall the one in Julius Caesar on the eve of Caesar's assassination, and conceivably Dickens drew on Shakespeare for the formulation of his views on the matter in Barnaby. In fact the mysterious connexion between the moods of man and nature - already discussed in the Introduction - has always held the attention of poets and writers, and in the line of gales and tempests as events on the sea, there is much between Defoe and Conrad. In The Heart of Midlothian, which was of special interest to Dickens in the context of Barnaby, Scott makes an ominous use of the storm,[1] when preparing the scene for Sir George Staunton's death at the hands of his own illegitimate son, 'The Whistler'. But perhaps a more significant example is the storm in Jane Eyre where the lightning strikes the great chestnut tree and rends it in twain, thus suggesting

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1. "There is something solemn in this delay of the storm," said Sir George; "it seems as if it suspended its peal till it solemnized some important event in the world below."
"Alas!" replied Butler, "what are we, that the laws of nature should correspond in their march with our ephemeral deeds or sufferings? The clouds will burst when surcharged with the electric fluid, whether a goat is falling at that instant from the cliffs of Arran, or a hero expiring on the field of battle he has won."
"The mind delights to deem it otherwise," said Sir George Staunton... - Ch. XLI.
This shows the essential difference between Scott's attitude to nature and Dickens's, in regard to the affairs of man. In the words of Ruskin, 'there is no passion in Scott which alters nature,' but, as shown in the Introduction there is such a passion in Dickens, and a very strong one indeed.

the impending failure of the marriage plans of Mr. Rochester and Jane. However, in view of all that has gone before, it can be urged that none among the English novelists wove into the warp and woof of his work the breath of the various atmospheric disturbances as Dickens did, and surely not with such purpose and beauty. For the effects realized through the symbolic patterns can be silent and mystifying as fog, noisy and open as wind and rain, gentle and light as the echo of a footstep, and loud and heavy as the crack of lightning and roll of thunder. It is interesting that whereas an elemental abnormality like fog depicts evil in its stagnant and confounding aspect, another like storm reveals it in its sudden and dramatic course. And Dickens achieves all this on an individual plane as well as on a social scale.

4 - THE DEVOURING, GENEROUS ELEMENT

'that mysterious fire which lurks in everything' - Edwin Drood

Dickens brackets fire and water together when he says that 'though excellent servants', they are both 'very bad masters'.[1] They figure in his work with equal significance and power, but fire seems to mature as a symbol sooner than water. However, rising from its ordinary usefulness and harmfulness to its paradoxical role as destroyer and preserver, each touches upon the mystery of life in the same way.

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1. Bleak House, Ch. XVII.

In the Sketches the parish fire-engine in 'Our Parish', 'the conflagration of the two Houses of Parliament' in 'A Parliamentary Sketch' and the jollity by the fireside in 'The New Year' mark the beginning of a process of development.

'A Madman's Manuscript' in Chapter XI of Pickwick again reveals a rabid imagination exulting in the destructive power of fire, 'A fine sight the grand house in flames, and the madman's wife smouldering away to cinders', while 'A good-humoured Christmas chapter' shows the cottager's wife and children crouching 'once more round the blazing fire', and throwing on 'another log of wood against father comes home'.

In Oliver after murdering Nancy, Sikes leaves town for 'the solitude and darkness of the road' and feels 'a dread and awe creeping upon him'. Then suddenly there arises upon the night-wind the noise of distant shouting, and that gives him back his strength and energy:

> 'The broad sky seemed on fire. Rising into the air with showers of sparks, and rolling one above the other, were sheets of flame, lighting the atmosphere for miles round, and driving clouds of smoke in the direction where he stood. The shouts grew louder as new voices swelled the roar, and he could hear the cry of Fire! mingled with the ringing of an alarm-bell, the fall of heavy bodies, and the crackling of flames as they twined round some new obstacle, and shot aloft as though refreshed by food. The noise increased as he looked. There were people there - men and women - light, bustle. It was like new life to him. He darted onward - straight, headlong - dashing through brier and brake, and leaping gate and fence as madly as the dog, who careered with loud and sounding bark before him.'

> 'The apertures, where doors and windows stood an hour ago, disclosed a mass of raging fire; walls rocked and crumbled into the burning well; the molten lead and iron poured down, white hot, upon the ground. Women and children shrieked, and men encouraged each other with noisy shouts and cheers... He shouted, too, till he was hoarse; and, flying from memory and himself, plunged into the thickest of the throng.' (OT, Ch. XLVIII)

The importance of this description lies in the fact that it bears directly upon Sikes's behaviour at a highly abnormal moment. Clearly

the fire incident here has no connexion with the story and has been introduced only for a psychological consideration. Dickens is trying to suggest that there exists a close kinship between a murderer's mind and the devouring element, that only the mad excitement of a physical conflagration can soothe a mental hell. That is why with the fire dying down to 'smoke and black ruins', the dreadful consciousness of the crime returns 'with tenfold force'.

Perhaps it is better to discuss this abnormal awful aspect of the element first and then to attend to its everyday cheerful side.

The Curiosity Shop takes a big step forward in the development of the fire symbol, and in a way Dickens's imagination is never really to surpass the beauty and power with which it invests the element at this stage. Even Bleak House, Hard Times, and Our Mutual Friend only repeat or enlarge its features as they are revealed here.

Little Nell and her grandfather are in the most painful stage of their wanderings. It is a dark cold night, and a poor workman leads them to a place of comfort:

> 'In a large and lofty building, supported by pillars of iron, with great black apertures in the upper walls, open to the external air; echoing to the roof with the beating of hammers and roar of furnaces, mingled with the hissing of red-hot metal plunged in water, and a hundred strange unearthly noises never heard elsewhere; in this gloomy place, moving like demons among the flame and smoke, dimly and fitfully seen, flushed and tormented by the burning fires, and wielding great weapons...a number of men laboured like giants. Others, reposing upon heaps of coals or ashes with their faces turned to the black vaults above, slept or rested from their toil. Others again, opening the white-hot furnace-door, cast fuel on the flames, which came rushing and roaring forth to meet it, and licked it up like oil. Others drew forth, with clashing noise upon the ground, great sheets of glowing steel, emitting an insupportable heat, and a dull deep light like that which reddens in the eyes of savage beasts.' (OCS, Ch. XLIV)

The description of the fire does not end here but continues in the form of the following conversation. It is yet night when the child awakes. She finds her grandfather asleep and the workman sitting on the rugged mat before the furnace-door, with his chin upon his hands, and motionlessly watching the fire. She draws close to him:

"I feared you were ill," she said. "The other men are all in motion, and you are so very quiet."

"They leave me to myself," he replied. "They know my humour. They laugh at me, but don't harm me in it. See yonder there - that's my friend."

"The fire?" said the child.

"It has been alive as long as I have," the man made answer. "We talk and think together all night long."

.....

"It's like a book to me," he said - "the only book I ever learned to read; and many an old story it tells me. It's music, for I should know its voice among a thousand, and there are other voices in its roar. It has its pictures too. You don't know how many strange faces and different scenes I trace in the red-hot coals. It's my memory, that fire, and shows me all my life."

.....

"Yes," he said, with a faint smile, "it was the same when I was quite a baby, and crawled about it, till I fell asleep. My father watched it then."

"Had you no mother," asked the child.

"No, she was dead. Women work hard in these parts. She worked herself to death they told me, and, as they said so then, the fire has gone on saying the same thing ever since. I suppose it was ever true. I have always believed it."

"Were you brought up here, then?" said the child.

"Summer and winter," he replied. "Secretly at first, but when they found it out, they let him keep me here. So the fire nursed me - the same fire. It has never gone out."

"You are fond of it?" said the child.

"Of course I am. He died before it. I saw him fall down - just there, where those ashes are burning now - and wondered, I remember, why it didn't help him." (Ibid.)

Nell watches him for a little while, but soon yields to sleep:

> 'When she awoke again, broad day was shining through the lofty openings in the walls, and, stealing in slanting rays but midway down, seemed to make the building darker than it had been at night. The clang and tumult were still going on, and the remorseless fires were burning fiercely as before; for few changes of night and day brought rest or quiet there.' (Ibid.)

In the morning the workman shares his breakfast with her grandfather, and she tells him that they seek some place remote from towns. He says he knows little of the country but he is sure there are such places. Then Nell asks him if these are far from where they are, and he says:

> "Ay surely. How could they be near us, and be green and fresh? The road lies too, through miles and miles, all lighted up by fires like ours - a strange black road, and one that would frighten you by night." (Ibid.)

This treatment of fire is significant in a number of ways. First of all the element generally stimulates musing, reflection and reminiscence. Secondly, it is an incentive to imaginative activity. Thirdly, it comes to have a hypnotic power over an individual who keeps close to it and responds to its hidden charm. Fourthly, it visits dreadful punishment on a society which harnesses it to monetary advantage as against human sentiment. The workman calls the furnace-fire his 'memory', because like 'a book' it tells him 'many an old story'. It sings its 'music' to him and shows its 'pictures' to him. Very clearly he is the fore-runner of Louisa in Hard Times and Lizzie in Our Mutual Friend, and whatever air of wonder surrounds them derives from here. The last extract above suggests the factory area around Rouncewell the iron-master's in Bleak House as well as the essential atmosphere of Hard Times inasmuch as it suggests the blighting effect of fire in mechanized industry on life. Thus 'broad day' is

represented as 'stealing in silent rays but midway down', so that the building is made darker than it has been at night. Again, the rhetorical question, 'How could they be near us, and be green and fresh?' only underlines the incompatibility of Nature with Science. And Dickens toes the Wordsworthian line yet further.

Little Nell and her grandfather follow the black road on which the workman has set them, and they arrive in a 'great manufacturing town'. Never in all their journeying had they longed so ardently, 'so pined and wearied, for the freedom of pure air and open country, as now'; never

> 'had they so yearned for the fresh solitudes of wood, hill-side, and field, as now; when the noise and dirt and vapour of the great manufacturing town, reeking with lean misery and hungry wretchedness, hemmed them in on every side, and seemed to shut out hope, and render escape impossible.'

> 'A long suburb of red brick houses, - some with patches of garden-ground, where coal-dust and factory smoke darkened the shrinking leaves, and coarse rank flowers; and where the struggling vegetation sickened and sank under the hot breath of kiln and furnace, making them by its presence seem yet more blighting and unwholesome than in the town itself, - a long, flat, straggling suburb passed, they came by slow degrees upon a cheerful region, where not a blade of grass was seen to grow; where not a bud put forth its promise in the spring; where nothing green could live but on the surface of the stagnant pools, which here and there lay idly sweltering by the black roadside.' (OCS, Ch. XLV)

> 'They had long since got clear of the smoke and furnaces, except in one or two solitary instances, where a factory planted among fields withered the space about it like a burning mountain.' (Ibid., Ch. XLVI)

It is surely not difficult to recognize the features of distant Coketown in the above passages.

The furnace-fire captures the reader's imagination. The workman leads a hypnotized life before it, as did his father before him. That

suggests a mystery which envelops generation after generation, and this continuity intensifies the mingled sense of love and awe with which the fire inspires its victim-devotees. Obviously, it is in relation to man that the mysterious power of the element has been realized here. It can hold him as its prey, in utter isolation from others, and yet offer him an echo of himself. And this identification means to him life as well as death.

Dickens has connected elemental mystery with social misery very successfully. From the individual bewitched suffering of the workman before the furnace develops the conscious suffering of the labour. The scenes of wide-spread hunger and disease that follow the extracts quoted above, make a real picture of horrors, diurnal as well as nocturnal; and 'night' falling like a black hammer in periodic motion, seems to symbolize a darkness which the fire-and-brimstone way of industrial materialism is spreading and which will soon envelop and extinguish all life, all creation.

The effect is both profound and immediate, because it has been achieved through a blend of absorbing mystery and disconcerting reality. But it did not come without a special consciousness on the part of the writer. The process was new, and naturally set Dickens thinking. As quoted in the Introduction, he wrote to Forster: 'You will recognise a description of the road we travelled between Birmingham and Wolverhampton but I had conceived it so well in my mind, that the execution doesn't please me quite as well as I expected.'

In Barnaby fire figures prominently but without symbolic shades of meaning. The half-witted Barnaby speaks the language of the man before the furnace:

> "I don't like bed. I like to lie before the fire, watching the prospects in the burning coals - the rivers, hills, and dells, in the deep, red sunset, and the wild faces.' (BR, Ch. XVII)

Besides this reference to the mysterious aspect of the element, there is Gashford's mischievous suggestion bearing upon its destructive role. He tells Hugh and Dennis the hangman: "Fire, the saying goes, is a good servant, but a bad master. Make it his master; he deserves no better." The dreadful hint is taken, and fire is made the master of the Warren of the Haredales. As the alarm bell rings, 'everything in the house is broken and smashed and huddled together and set ablaze amidst howling, yelling and mad carousing':

> 'The more the fire crackled and raged, the wilder and more cruel the men grew; as though moving in that element they became fiends, and changed their earthly natures for the qualities that give delight in hell.'

> 'If Bedlam gates had been flung open wide, there would not have issued forth such maniacs as the frenzy of that night had made... There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns... On the skull of one drunken lad - not twenty by his looks - who lay upon the ground with a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot; melting his head like wax.' (BR, Ch. LV)

That seems to point back to Oliver where the murderer, Sikes, freely grapples with a horrible fire.

The act of arson is described at length and graphically:

> 'The burning pile, revealing rooms and passages red hot, through gaps made in the crumbling walls; the tributary fires that licked the outer bricks and stones, with their long-forked tongues, and ran up to meet the glowing mass within; the shining of the flames upon the villains who looked on and fed them; the roaring of the angry blaze, so bright and high that it seemed in its rapacity to have swallowed up the very smoke; the living flakes the wind bore rapidly away and hurried on with, like a storm of fiery snow; the noiseless breaking of great beams of wood, which fell like feathers on the heap of ashes, and crumbled in the very act to sparks and powder; the lurid tinge that over-

spread the sky, and the darkness, very deep by contrast, which prevailed around...' (Ibid.)

Fire becomes the master of Newgate also:

'The flames roared high and fiercely, blackening the prison-wall, and twining up its lofty front like burning serpents. At first they crowded round the blaze, and vented their exultation only in their looks; but when it grew hotter and fiercer - when it crackled, leaped, and roared, like a great furnace - ...when through the deep red heat and glow, the fire was seen sporting and toying with the door, now clinging to its obdurate surface, now gliding off with fierce inconstancy and soaring high into the sky, anon returning to fold it in its burning grasp and lure it to its ruin - ...when wall and tower, and roof and chimney-stack, seemed drunk, and in the flickering glare appeared to reel and stagger - when scores of objects, never seen before, burst out upon the view, and things the most familiar put on some new aspect - then the mob began to join the whirl, and with loud yells, and shouts, and clamour...bestirred themselves to feed the fire, and keep it at its height.' (BR, Ch. LXIV)

The fires of hate in Barnaby rise at the instigation of secret miscreants like Gashford but under the leadership of social victims like Hugh, and it is along the latter course that they eventually merge in the fires of retribution in A Tale of Two Cities.

Thus fire can be used as a weapon against social injustice and inhuman usage, and Dickens seems to tolerate it as such. This is clear from his reaction to 'The Tombs', the dark and filthy cells in New York, where common offenders are shut up before trial. The description of their horrors concludes with a significant reference to the frequent conflagrations which are not wholly accidental:

'but be this as it may, there was a fire last night, there are two to-night, and you may lay an even wager there will be at least one, to-morrow. So, carrying that with us for our comfort, let us say, Good-night.' (AN, Ch. VI)

Similar in tone is a passage in The Chimes in which Trotty's troubled dream depicts the rage of the wronged Fern:

"There'll be Fire to-night... There'll be Fires this winter-time, to light the dark nights, East, West, North, and

> South. When you see the distant sky red, they'll be blazing. When you see the distant sky red, think of me no more; or if you do, remember what a Hell was lighted up inside of me, and think you see its flames reflected in the clouds."

The charming power of the element is confirmed from personal experience during a visit to the volcanic region near Naples. The active crater draws the party towards itself:

> 'There is something in the fire and roar, that guarantees an irresistible desire to get nearer to it. We cannot rest long, without starting off, two of us, on our hands and knees, accompanied by the head-guide, to climb to the brim of the flaming crater, and try to look in.' (PI, 'A Rapid Diorma')

As suggested earlier, Dickens repeatedly emphasizes the fact that fire encourages reflection. Most of the characters in the novels, particularly from Dombey onwards, are found looking musingly at it, while some, who are exceptionally imaginative, develop a sense of fellowship with it. Paul is also like the workman before the furnace and Barnaby. He asks his 'papa' what money can do, 'looking at the fire, and up at him, and at the fire, and up at him again'. And he follows the argument with Mr. Dombey, 'looking at the fire again, as though the fire had been his adviser and prompter', and finally he sits 'with his chin resting on his hand, still cogitating and looking for an explanation in the fire'.

In Bleak House also fire figures as responsive company and in vicinity to thought. Esther waits at Kenge and Carboy's to go before the Chancellor: 'Then I went on, thinking, thinking, thinking; and the fire went on burning, burning, burning.'

Later Ada and Richard join her:

> 'Our all three coming together for the first time, in such an unusual place, was a thing to talk about; and we talked about it; and the fire, which had left off roaring, winked its red eyes

> at us - as Richard said - like a drowsy old Chancery lion.' (BH, Ch. III)

Besides this familiar appearance of fire, there is its metaphorical use. Hawdon, alias Nemo, is dead: 'O, if, in brighter days, the now-extinguished fire within him ever burned for one woman who held him in her heart, where is she, while these ashes are above the ground!' This emotional self-combustion subtly suggests that of Lady Dedlock who will visit the spot when her lover's ashes will be under the ground. But perhaps the more important point is that Dickens is preparing to make a great imaginative advance. From the figurative fire and ashes here, he is to switch over to something real 'on the ground, before the fire':

> 'Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is - is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal?' (BH, Ch. XXXII)

This is what fire has left, or made, of Krook the 'Lord Chancellor of that Court', and that is what it would make, or leave, of all crooks, 'all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done.'

This climax is promised in the very exposition of the novel. The Chancellor 'dexterously' vanishes from the Court. 'Everybody else quickly vanishes too':

> 'A battery of blue bags is loaded with heavy charges of papers and carried off by clerks...the empty court is locked up. If all the injustice it has committed, and all the misery it has caused, could only be locked up with it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre...' (BH, Ch. I)

And the denouement sets the seal of confirmation on the whole pattern:

'Our suspense was short; for a break up soon took place in the crowd, and the people came streaming out looking flushed and hot, and bringing a quantity of bad air with them... We stood aside, watching for any countenance we knew; and presently great bundles of paper began to be carried out - bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes, which the bearers staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow, on the Hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more.' (BH, Ch. LXV)

That is 'a great funeral pyre' indeed.

Thus a mere metaphor develops into a powerful symbol. Fire burns to purify, and brings about a purge as it enacts a ruin.

On the industrial side, however, there seems to be a slight contradiction[1] in Bleak House in view of Dickens's earlier and later treatment of fire. Mr. Rouncewell the ironmaster is no doubt represented in a favourable light, but the descriptions of his factory and its approaches recall the Black Country in the Curiosity Shop and promise Coketown in Hard Times. George journeys into the industrial north to meet his brother:

'As he comes into the iron country farther north, such fresh green woods as those of Chesney Wold are left behind; and coal-pits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires, and a heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke, become the features of the scenery.'

'At last, on the black canal bridge of a busy town, with a clang of iron in it, and more fires and more smoke than he has seen yet, the trooper, swart with the dust of the coal roads, checks his horse...'

'He comes to a gateway in the brick wall, looks in, and sees a great perplexity of iron lying about, in every stage, and in a vast variety of shapes; in bars, in wedges, in sheets; in tanks, in boilers, in axles, in wheels, in cogs, in cranks, in rails;

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1. On 18 April 1852 in a letter to Miss Burdett-Coutts, Dickens spoke well of some 'large ironmasters' who had 'proceeded on the self-supporting principle!, and 'done wonders with their workpeople'. - Butt and Tillotson, p. 199.
Also see Letters from Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, (1953) ed. Edgar Johnson, p. 199.

> twisted and wrenched into eccentric and perverse forms, as separate parts of machinery; mountains of it broken up, and rusty in its age; distant furnaces of it glowing and bubbling in its youth; bright fireworks of it showering about, under the blows of the steam-hammer; red-hot iron, white-hot iron, cold-black iron; an iron taste, an iron smell, and a Babel of iron sounds.' (BH, Ch. LXIII)

Thus Dickens does not make any real concession to the monetary culture that industry is bringing, nor does he dilute its blighting influence on landscape. He just shows that a good man like Mr. Rouncewell the ironmaster might overcome the natural limitations of materialistic endeavour.

Hard Times is perhaps as important as the Curiosity Shop in the matter of the fire image. Because just as an air of mystery merges in a sense of social misery through the workman before the furnace there, exactly so the matrimonial prospect is joined to the industrial scene through Louisa contemplating the fire here. And if the earlier treatment excels on the purely imaginative side, the later does so on the artistic.

Tom and Louisa are chatting. He describes their home, Stone Lodge, as a 'Jaundiced Jail' and tells her of his plans to go to Mr. Bounderby's. Her special interest in the element is suggested throughout. She sits 'in the darker corner by the fireside, now looking at him, now looking at the bright sparks as they dropped upon the hearth', and she speaks 'after silently watching the sparks awhile'. When Tom discloses his future manoeuvres at Bounderby's in terms of herself, she becomes silent and thoughtful:

> "Have you gone to sleep, Loo?"
>
> "No, Tom. I am looking at the fire."
>
> "You seem to find more to look at in it than ever I could

find," said Tom. "Another of the advantages, I suppose, of being a girl." (HT, Bk. I, Ch. VIII)

Then she asks him if he is satisfied with the change to Mr. Bounderby's, 'in a curious tone, as if she were reading what she asked in the fire, and it were not quite plainly written there'.

Again, when her answer is long in coming, Tom goes and leans on the back of her chair to contemplate the fire which so engrossed her, from her point of view, and see what he could make of it:

> "Except that it is a fire," said Tom, "it looks to me as stupid and blank as everything else looks. What do you see in it? Not a circus!"
>
> "I don't see anything in it, Tom, particularly. But since I have been looking at it, I have been wondering about you and me, grown up." (Ibid.)

Mrs. Gradgrind, stepping in at this moment, presumes that Tom has encouraged his sister to wonder. But Louisa explains her offence:

> "I was encouraged by nothing, mother, but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it." (Ibid.)

Then the time comes when Mr. Gradgrind realizes Louisa is quite a young woman, but the fire never loses her favour: 'All this while, Louisa had been passing on, so quiet and reserved, and so much given to watching the bright ashes, at twilight as they fell into the grate and became extinct...'

Just before Tom turns up to suggest what Mr. Gradgrind has to say to her, she is leaning her elbow on her hand and looking 'again at the short-lived sparks that so soon subsided into ashes'. Then with 'her hand upon her brother's shoulder', she still stands 'looking at the fire'. He presses her in his arm, and kisses her cheek. She returns the kiss, but still looks 'at the fire'. Having done his best to

further his own designs through her marriage with Bounderby, Tom goes away:

> 'She gave him an affectionate good night, and went out with him to the door, whence the fires of Coketown could be seen, making the distance lurid. She stood there, looking steadfastly towards them, and listening to his departing steps... It seemed as if, first in her own fire within the house, and then in the fiery haze without, she tried to discover what kind of woof Old Time, that greatest and longest-established Spinner of all, would weave from the threads he had already spun into a woman. But his factory is a secret place, his work is noiseless, and his Hands are mutes.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. XIV)

Thus imperceptibly Dickens blends for the reader individual sensibility with social concern through the fire image.

In the next chapter when the father and daughter meet to discuss Mr. Bounderby's proposal, it is morning. Dickens returns to the symbolic note struck at the end of the last chapter: 'Silence between them. The deadly statistical clock very hollow. The distant smoke very black and heavy.'

Mr. Gradgrind has disclosed Mr. Bounderby's proposal to his daughter, and she has sat looking at him fixedly:

> 'Removing her eyes from him, she sat so long looking silently towards the town, that he said, at length: "Are you consulting the chimneys of the Coketown works, Louisa?"
>
> '"There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, Father!" she answered, turning quickly.
>
> '"Of course I know that, Louisa. I do not see the application of the remark." To do him justice he did not, at all.
>
> 'She passed it away with a slight motion of her hand, and concentrating her attention upon him again, said, "Father, I have often thought that life is very short."' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. XV)

That last remark about life being very short, effects imaginative association with 'the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying' which had encouraged her to wonder.

To her father's great relief she agrees to marry Mr. Bounderby. But when she is asked if she has ever entertained in secret any other proposal, she expresses her hunger for fancies and affections, and betrays her impatience with facts and realities. Her gesture depicts the futility of her palpable acquirements which have guided her into the proposed marital course:

> 'As she said it, she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and slowly opened it as though she were releasing dust or ash.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. XV)

Perhaps the hopelessness of the matrimonial proposal just accepted is foreshadowed here, and, of course, in terms of the familiar image of the fire residue.

It is interesting that while Louisa contemplates the fire, Tom and Mr. Gradgrind do not. The brother even tries to see its engrossing secret from the sister's point of view but fails. Similar is the father's lack of imagination. He says 'he cannot see the application' of her remark about 'night' and Fire', and Dickens sets his author's seal to his blindness; 'To do him justice he did not, at all.'

There appears to be a contradiction involved here. The father as the protagonist of utilitarianism needs must be totally impervious to Fancy - as indeed he is - but why should the son be like him in this and the daughter different? After all, they have been both brought up and taught in the same system. There is perhaps a two-fold explanation. First, Dickens seems to think that the female sex is by nature more susceptible to fanciful influences - Tom says of Louisa's interest in the fire: "Another of the advantages, I suppose, of being a girl." That is also the reason why she is shown to be more responsive than

Tom[1] to the humane air about Sissy Jupe who represents the Sleary philosophy in the heart of Gradgrindery. Secondly, Dickens does not show Louisa charmed by the fire. She does not find pictures or music in it. She only contemplates it, and although she appears to read what she has to say in the fire, it does not seem to be 'quite plainly written there'. She essentially remains a Gradgrind product, just incidentally acted upon by Slearyism. She says to Sissy even before she tells her the moving story of her father's failure as a clown: "You are more useful to my mother, and more pleasant with her than I can ever be... You are pleasanter to yourself, than I am to myself." Nevertheless, Gradgrindery holds its own in her, because she succumbs to the charm of the element only in a utilitarian spirit. She looks 'at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying', and learns the lesson that life is short. She puts it to practical use in the matter of her marriage, and she knows that she has gone the way opposite to Sissy's. Louisa has just given her assent to Mr. Bounderby's proposal:

> 'When Mr. Gradgrind had presented Mrs. Bounderby, Sissy had suddenly turned her head, and looked, in wonder, in pity, in sorrow, in doubt, in a multitude of emotions, towards Louisa. Louisa had known it, and seen it, without looking at her. From that moment she was impassive, proud and cold - held Sissy at a distance - changed to her altogether.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. XV)

The mystery enveloping the workman before the furnace does not gather over Louisa before the fire, but it is clear that to a great extent the Curiosity Shop occupies the imaginative background of

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1. Hard Times, Bk. I, Ch. VIII -
'"You don't hate Sissy, Tom?"
'"I hate to be obliged to call her Jupe. And she hates me," said Tom, moodily.'

Hard Times. And this is truer of the depiction of the industrial scene, for Coketown is the consummation - as the Rouncewell factory in Bleak House was an echo - of the 'great manufacturing town' whose vicinity was marked by the 'paths of coal-ash and huts of staring brick', and whose outskirts were indicated by 'scattered streets and houses, and smoke from distant furnaces':

> 'Now, the clustered roofs, and piles of buildings trembling with the working of engines, and dimly resounding with their shrieks and throbbings; the tall chimneys vomiting forth a black vapour, which hung in a dense ill-favoured cloud above the house-tops and filled the air with gloom...' (OCS, Ch. XLIII)

While a collation of this and the extracts quoted earlier from the Curiosity Shop with some of the Coketown descriptions in Hard Times may reveal a general connexion between them, a brief discussion of the recurring images in each case will perhaps be of greater interest.

The 'dark depressing influence' of the Black Country steals upon the spirits of Nell and her grandfather:

> 'On every side, and far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form, which is the horror of oppressive dreams, poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air. On mounds of ashes by the wayside, sheltered only by a few rough boards, or rotten pent-house roofs, strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures; clanking their iron chains, shrieking in their rapid whirl from time to time as though in torment unendurable, and making the ground tremble with their agonies... Then came more of the wrathful monsters, whose like they almost seemed to be in their wildness and their untamed air, screeching and turning round and round again; and still, before, behind, and to the right and left, was the same interminable perspective of brick towers, never ceasing in their black vomit, blasting all things living or inanimate, shutting out the face of day, and closing in on all these horrors with a dense dark cloud.' (OCS, Ch. XLV)

The images of the tall chimneys vomiting forth a black vapour and

the huge engines spinning and writhing like tortured, wrathful monsters above are repeated in the Coketown pictures:

> 'It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage.
>
> 'It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. V)
>
> 'The Fairy palaces burst into illumination, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. A clattering of clogs upon the pavement; a rapid ringing of bells; and all the melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again.'
>
> 'The rain fell, and the Smoke-serpents, submissive to the curse of all that tribe, trailed themselves upon the earth. In the waste-yard outside, the steam from the escape pipe, the litter of barrels and old iron, the shining heaps of coals, the ashes everywhere, were shrouded in a veil of mist and rain.' (Ibid., Ch. XI)
>
> 'The bell was ringing, and the Serpent was a Serpent of many coils, and the Elephant was getting ready.' (Ibid., Ch. XII)
>
> 'Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays. You only knew the town was there, because you knew there could have been no such sulky blotch upon the prospect without a town. A blur of soot and smoke, now confusedly tending this way, now that way, now aspiring to the vault of Heaven, now murkily creeping along the earth, as the wind rose and fell, or changed its quarter: a dense formless jumble, with sheets of cross light in it, that showed nothing but masses of darkness:- Coketown in the distance was suggestive of itself, though not a brick could be seen.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. I)

It is not difficult to see what a transformation the two images have undergone. They are more vividly perceived now, because they are in more definite shape: the smoke is realized as a Serpent and the monsters as Elephants. But this result has not been achieved at a stroke. In fact a gradual development is visible in the matter of the 'black vapour'. For instance, in Chuzzlewit there is a ghostly

air about the uninhabited chambers in the Temple where Tom Pinch has found employment:

> 'Every morning when he shut his door at Islington, he turned his face towards an atmosphere of unaccountable fascination, as surely as he turned it to the London smoke; and from that moment, it thickened round and round him all day long, until the time arrived for going home again, and leaving it, like a motionless cloud, behind.' (MC, Ch. XL)

Its vitiating, blighting appearance helps evoke the atmosphere of stagnation and decay in Bleak House:

> 'Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes - gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun.' (BH, Ch. I)

> 'For smoke, which is the London ivy, had so wreathed itself round Peffer's name, and clung to his dwelling-place, that the affectionate parasite quite overpowered the parent tree.' (BH, Ch. X)

If the smoke ivy in Bleak House depicts the deluded-cum-parasitic character of human activity on the legal and judicial side, the smoke serpent in Hard Times illustrates its misguided and vicious aspect in the matrimonial and industrial field. It is needless to say that the biblical colour of the latter image vastly increases its suggestive possibilities, particularly amid the frequent references, overt and covert, to the New Testament.[1]

The soul-quenching atmosphere of the factories here clearly points back to that in the Curiosity Shop. The 'melancholy mad elephants' keep going in dull fury:

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1. "Thou knowest who said, 'Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone at her!'" (HT, Bk. I, Ch. XIII)
   'Else wherefore live we in a Christian land, eighteen hundred and odd years after our Master?' (Ibid., Ch. XIV)
   "Often as I coom to myseln, and found it shinin on me down there in my trouble, I thought it were the star as guided to Our Saviour's home. I awmust think it be the very star!" (HT, Bk. III, Ch. VI)

> 'Their wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. The measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. I)

This contrast between Nature and Science appears once again in the true Wordsworthian spirit.

As suggested earlier, fire becomes a bad master in Oliver and Barnaby, but it does so in the ordinary uncontrolled way. In the Curiosity Shop and Hard Times, on the other hand, it figures as a good servant, as a force of nature harnessed to mechanical advantage. But whether a bad master through disorder, or a good servant through order, it only means destruction and death, direct and physical in one case, indirect and spiritual in the other. The power that man wrests from Vulcan does in no way bode well for him.[1] There is, however, all the difference between the Curiosity Shop and Hard Times in this common feature, and it lies in the matter of technique. While the Black Country marks only one stage in the journey of the child and the old man, Coketown is perhaps the most important scene of action, for it is on this rock that the vessel of Gradgrindery founders completely, calling into play the saving grace of Slearyism. Louisa's unhappiness and Tom's undoing both seek solace through Sissy. Again, as already shown, the smoke and the fire here continue to appear to portray character, to underline setting, or to evoke atmosphere. They also depict the tone of the present moment and reflect that of the moment to come. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the lines which wind up the story -

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1. It is noticeable that steam locomotion symbolizes Death in Dombey.

'Here was Louisa on the night of the same day, watching the fire as in days of yore, though with a gentler and a humbler face. How much of the future might arise before her vision?'

Dickens sums up 'Present' and suggests 'Future', as they affect the principal characters, through this 'vision' of Louisa's, which he invokes at the end of each paragraph. Finally he says:

'Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold.' (HT, Bk. III, Ch. IX)

In view of this and what has been said earlier, it can perhaps be held that the fire images contribute most to the artistic unity of Hard Times.

The image of the dying fire, which operates as a motive power in Louisa's life, and which sets a tone of reflection and resignation in general, figures significantly in Dorrit.

After his return home from abroad Arthur Clennam renews his acquaintance with Mr. Casby, and meets his daughter Flora, the flame of his early youth, and is thoroughly disillusioned. He sits indulging in a retrospect:

'That he should have missed so much, and at his time of life should look so far about him for any staff to bear him company upon his downward journey and cheer it, was a just regret. He looked at the fire from which the blaze departed, from which the after-glow subsided, in which the ashes turned grey, from which they dropped to dust, and thought, "How soon I too shall pass through such changes, and be gone!"' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XIII)

Arthur reacts to the change from a red blaze to white ashes in the same way as Louisa; it suggests the shortness of human life.

Again, the fire in Mrs. Clennam's room serves to portray her:

'In her two long narrow windows, the fire shone sullenly all day, and sullenly all night. On rare occasions, it flashed up passionately, as she did; but for the most part it was suppressed, like her, and preyed upon itself evenly and slowly.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XV)

The fire here symbolizes emotion and passion which, when repressed, consume mind and body. In fact this is another reference to the element as a destructive power, and Dickens employs it again as such in A Tale of Two Cities. Monsieur Defarge sells no ordinary wine: 'No vivacious Bacchanalian flame leaped out of the pressed grape of Monsieur Defarge: but a smouldering fire that burnt in the dark, lay hidden in the dregs of it.' Then, in Chapter XXIII of Book II 'Fire rises', and the couriers of chaos post East, West, North, and South. The late Marquis's chateau 'must burn':

> 'Presently, the chateau began to make itself strangely visible by some light of its own, as though it were growing luminous. Then, a flickering streak played behind the architecture of the front, picking out transparent places, and showing where balustrades, arches, and windows were. Then it soared higher, and grew broader and brighter. Soon, from a score of the great windows, flames burst forth, and the stone faces awakened, stared out of fire.'
>
> 'The chateau was left to itself to flame and burn. In the roaring and raging of the conflagration, a red-hot wind, driving straight from the infernal regions, seemed to be blowing the edifice away. With the rising and falling of the blaze, the stone faces showed as if they were in torment. When great masses of stone and timber fell, the face with the two dints in the nose became obscured: anon struggled out of the smoke again, as if it were the face of the cruel Marquis, burning at the stake and contending with the fire.
>
> 'The chateau burned; the nearest trees, laid hold of by the fire, scorched and shrivelled; trees at a distance...begirt the blazing edifice with a new forest of smoke. Molten lead and iron boiled in the marble basin of the fountain; the water ran dry; the extinguisher tops of the towers vanished like ice before the heat, and tricked down into four rugged wells of flame. Great rents and splits branched out in the solid walls, like crystallisation; stupefied birds wheeled about and dropped into the furnace...' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. XXIII)

The tocsin rings impatiently, but in vain. The mender of roads, and 'two hundred and fifty particular friends', stand with folded arms at the fountain, 'looking at the pillar of fire in the sky, and say,

"It must be forty feet high."'[1] The 'beacon' lighted here points the way to the fires of retribution that will soon engulf all France. Clearly the descriptions above derive some of their colour and fury from Barnaby, but there is here, about every touch of the brush, an air of inclusiveness and sweep which the intervening years alone could have brought.

In Great Expectations fire appears both as a confidant and a destroyer. After his first unhappy encounter with Magwitch in the churchyard, Pip sits looking 'disconsolately at the fire', and the whole terrible scene is conjured up before the boy 'in the avenging coals'. But he has a direct experience of the awful aspect of the element at Satis House:

> 'In the moment when I was withdrawing my head to go quietly away, I saw a great flaming light spring up. In the same moment I saw her running at me, shrieking, with a whirl of fire blazing all about her, and soaring at least as many feet above her head as she was high.' (GE, Ch. XLIX)

Even after the incident, 'the glare of the flames, their hurry and noise, and the fierce burning smell', and Miss Havisham's figure running at him 'with all that height of fire above her head', haunt Pip's mind.

Dickens has recourse to fire here because he wants to break up Miss Havisham's chronic sham and clear away the nuptial debris: 'patches of tinder yet alight were floating in the smoky air, which a moment ago had been her faded bridal dress... I looked round and saw the disturbed beetles and spiders running away over the floor...' Obviously fire brings about a purge here as in Bleak House.

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1. The pillar of fire here is Jacquerie's exact answer to Aristocracy's treatment of the Marquis's avenging assassin, Gaspard, who was hanged 'forty feet high'. See the Tale, Bk. II, Ch. XV.

In Our Mutual Friend fire figures as prominently as in the Curiosity Shop or Hard Times, but Dickens's treatment of it does not show its destructive aspect here, it being almost entirely limited to its imaginative appeal. As stated earlier, in this sense Lizzie Hexam is a direct descendant of the workman before the furnace and Louisa before the fire, and while she holds the centre of the stage before the brazier, there is a conscious or unconscious interest evinced in the element by almost everybody. For, even though in a casual way, or some of them for Lizzie's sake, Charley, Eugene, Mortimer, Captain Joey, Mr. and Mrs. Lammle, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, Bella, Mr. Wegg, Mr. Venus, Twemlow, Fledgeby, Riderhood, Bradley, all look at the fire.

Fire-gazing is introduced very early into the story. Lizzie and Charley sit before the fire-place, talking and waiting for father. She draws his attention to the glow of the burning coal, and he says it is gas. He tries to give it a dig, but she says:

> '"Don't disturb it, Charley, or it'll be all in a blaze. It's that dull glow near it, coming and going, that I mean. When I look at it of an evening, it comes like pictures to me, Charley."
>
> '"Show us a picture," said the boy. "Tell us where to look."
>
> '"Ah! It wants my eyes, Charley."' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. III)

A little later she gives the story of their younger days, 'some of the pictures of the past', as she sees them in the fire. Then Charley asks for 'a fortune-telling one; a future one', which she begins to give:

> "Well! There am I, continuing with father, and holding to father, because father loves me and I love father. I can't so much as read a book, because, if I had learned, father would have thought I was deserting him, and I should have lost my influence. I have not the influence I want to have, I cannot stop some

> dreadful things I try to stop, but I go on in the hope and trust that the time will come. In the meanwhile I know that I am in some things a stay to father, and that if I was not faithful to him he would - in revenge-like, or in disappointment, or both - go wild and bad." (Ibid.)

And then Charley wants 'a touch of fortune-telling pictures' about himself, and she says:

> "There are you, Charley, working your way, in secret from father, at the school; and you get prizes; and you go on better and better; and you come to be a...
>
> .....
>
> "You come to be a pupil-teacher, and you still go on better and better, and you rise to be a master full of learning and respect. But the secret has come to father's knowledge long before, and it has divided you from father, and from me." (Ibid.)

Charley protests against this suggestion, but Lizzie persists in making it:

> "I see, as plain as plain can be, that your way is not ours, and that even if father could be got to forgive your taking it... that way of yours would be darkened by our way..." (Ibid.)

When Lizzie finishes with her 'fortune-telling pictures', Charley remarks: "You said you couldn't read a book, Lizzie. Your library of books is the hollow down by the flare, I think."

Thus 'the hollow down by the flare' reflects the past as well as the future. It shows pictures to Lizzie and is her 'library of books', just as the furnace-fire was music and pictures and stories to the workman. What is more important is the way the course of coming events has been suggested. Gaffer's doubtful ways, Lizzie's fidelity to his person and his name, and Charley's falling apart from them, all is dramatically foreshadowed. A question arises: Is not the fire here only a device to capture a flashback or to create a sense of imminence? The answer is: No, it is not <u>only</u> that; it is much more.

As earlier suggested, Dickens seems to invest the element with a charming power which woos the on-looker into a state of reflection and contemplation, and these not only awaken reminiscence in him, but also bestow upon him a measure of insight. Fire-gazing is thus an activity capable of developing a divining consciousness in extraordinarily imaginative persons.

Lizzie is inseparable from the fire. In fact she cannot be imagined without it. She sits, and waits, and reads the days gone by and the days to come in the burning coal. Eugene sees her watching for her father for the last time:

> 'There was a kind of film or flicker on her face, which at first he took to be the fitful fire-light; but, on a second look, he saw that she was weeping. A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire.'
>
> 'A deep rich piece of colour, with the brown flush of her cheek and the shining lustre of her hair, though sad and solitary, weeping by the rising and the falling of the fire.' (OMF, Bk. I, Ch. XII)

Her fascination with the fire becomes a taunt to her. Charley asks her not to pull him back when he is trying his best 'to get up in the world'. He wants her not to think about 'Father's grave', and to 'let bygones be bygones':

> "What we have got to do is, to turn our faces full in our new direction, and keep straight on..."
>
> "You are such a dreamer... It was all very well when we sat before the fire - when we looked into the hollow down by the flare - but we are looking into the real world, now."

He urges her to give up living with Jenny, "a little crooked antic of a child": "Now, do be more practical..." Then he sums up the position:

> "All I say is, that I hope you'll control your fancies a little, on my account." (OMF, Bk. II, Ch. I)

A little later when Mr. Headstone praises her, Charley says: "I used to call the fire at home, her books, for she was always full of fancies...when she sat looking at it." But the master remarks, 'I don't like that'.

These touches strongly recall those quoted earlier from Hard Times, so that in this debate of practical versus fanciful in the context of fire, Lizzie, Charley, and Mr. Headstone clearly point back to Louisa, Tom, and Mr. Gradgrind. But, of course, the difference between Lizzie and Louisa is the same as between the riverside and Stone Lodge, or between boating and schooling.

Miss Wren further stimulates Lizzie's interest in the fire. Imagining aloud her 'He' - as she often does - she mentions Mr. Wrayburn as a gentleman, and asks Lizzie what she would think of him if she were a lady. Lizzie laughs at the idea, but the little dolls' dressmaker insists on being humoured, although 'just as a fancy, and for instance'. Lizzie's musing face looks at 'the hollow down by the flare' to "find a lady there". She presently sees her, and begins telling her fortunes:

> "She is very rich..."
>
> "She is very handsome..."
>
> "Her heart - is given him, with all its love and truth. She would joyfully die with him, or, better than that, die for him. She knows he has failings, but she thinks they have grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of. And she says, that lady rich and beautiful that I can never come near, 'Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you.'" (OMF, Bk. II, Ch. XI)

It is not at all difficult to see that the entire course of the

love story of Eugene and Lizzie is suggested in these lines. Just as Charley gives a fillip to Lizzie's fancy in the beginning of the First Book, exactly so does Jenny early in the Second, and this is at a time when the fortunes of the Hexams almost come to be as they were told. For it is only three chapters later that Charley spurns Lizzie: "You are an inveterately bad girl, and a false sister, and I have done with you. For ever, I have done with you!" And Lizzie, laying her face in her hands on the stone coping, mourns the creatures of her fancy: "Oh, Charley, Charley, that this should be the end of our pictures in the fire."

Similarly interwoven are the strands of this second fortune-telling and those of the third. This time the stimulus does not come from without. Lizzie is conscious of her own divining power and shows it.

Bella meets Lizzie at the village near the paper-mill, and goes to speak with her in her own home. The fire figures significantly throughout the interview:

> 'The day was closing as the two girls looked at one another by the fireside. The dusky room was lighted by the fire. The grate might have been the old brazier, and the glow might have been the old hollow down by the flare.'
>
> 'As...her glance sought the fire, there was a quiet resolution in her folded hands...'
>
> 'As she said, with her eyes upon the fire-glow, there was an instantaneous escape of distress into her face...'
>
> 'Lizzie, with a drooping head, glanced down at the glow in the fire where her first fancies had been nursed, and her first escape made from the grim life out of which she had plucked her brother, foreseeing her reward.' (OMF, Bk. III, Ch. IX)

Their talk is marked by affection and confidence, and Lizzie tells Bella about Bradley's deadly jealousy of Eugene. Then as the

time comes for separating, Bella's discussion of herself leads to Lizzie's use of her old resource:

> "I used to see pictures...to please my brother. Shall I tell you what I see down there where the fire is glowing?"
>
> .....
>
> "Shall I tell you...what I see down there?"
>
> .....
>
> "A heart well worth winning, and well won. A heart, once won goes through fire and water for the winner, and never changes, and is never daunted."

Of course, this is "Most clearly and distinctly" Bella's heart.

Bella's mettle and its test, as imagined by Lizzie, are recalled, when, having left the rich Boffins, she marries the 'poor' Secretary:

> "I have not written to Lizzie Hexam since I wrote and told her that I really had a lover - a whole one. I have often thought I would like to tell her how right she was when she pretended to read in the live coals that I would go through fire and water for him. I am in the humour to tell her so to-night, John, and I'll stay at home and do it." (OMF, Bk. IV, Ch. V)

The knots of the second and third fortune-tellings are finally unravelled almost together. In the very next chapter Lizzie saves Eugene's life, and a little later becomes his wife. Book the Fourth rightly does not show Lizzie reading any new things in the fire, because the novel is drawing to a close.

The last appearance of the fire is important in another sense. Bradley is visiting Riderhood at the Lock-house, and they both lapse into silence, 'with their eyes upon the fire'. But Bradley is more rapt in reflection before it, although time was when he had not liked that in Lizzie:

> 'Bradley looked at the fire, with a working face, and was silent for a while...'

'Bradley again looked at the fire...'

'Bradley put the purse in his pocket, grasped his left wrist with his right hand, and sat rigidly contemplating the fire.'

'Not one other word did Bradley utter all that night. Not once did he change his attitude, or loosen his hold upon his wrist. Rigid before the fire, as if it were a charmed flame that was turning him old, he sat, with the dark lines deepening in his face, its stare becoming more and more haggard, its surface turning whiter and whiter as if it were being overspread with ashes, and the very texture and colour of his hair degenerating.' (OMF, Bk. IV, Ch. XV)

It is on the night before he falls into the Lock in a death-embrace with Riderhood. Clearly the fire here assumes a sombre and ominous aspect, prefiguring in the white ashes what the morning is to bring. This image points back to Hard Times where besides signifying the shortness of human life, it reflects what is in store for the principal characters, especially in the concluding paragraphs. In fact, that seems to be the starting point in Our Mutual Friend, because it is primarily as an indicator of the coming events that the fire appears there. As suggested earlier, Dickens brings it in at almost regular intervals to suggest the future trend of the story. And the device is highly artistic, for it creates not only a halo of mystery round the figure of Lizzie, but also a sense of imminence. One might even say that in view of the specially difficult design of the novel, 'much enhanced by the mode of publication', 'the story weaver at his loom' employed the fire image still better to 'perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern.'[1]

In 'Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy' Mr. Buffle's is in flames, and the element appears as a destructive power again. But earlier in little

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1. Our Mutual Friend, 'POSTSCRIPT'.

Jemmy - in 'Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings' - one can see a glimpse of Paul Dombey. He is going to tell a story:

> 'Then he sat looking at the fire, and then he began to laugh in a sort of confidence with the fire...'
>
> 'Then he once more took the fire into the same sort of confidence as before...'

In 'Mugby Junction', however, fire figures a little differently. 'Barbox Brothers' the traveller gets down from the night train:

> 'Speaking to himself he spoke to a man within five years of fifty either way, who had turned grey too soon, like a neglected fire.'

That 'Barbox Brothers' is a development of young Jackson is shown in another soliloquy:

> 'Throughout this dialogue, the traveller spoke to himself at his window in the morning, as he had spoken to himself at the Junction overnight. And as he had then looked in the darkness, a man who had turned grey too soon, like a neglected fire: so he now looked in the sunlight, an ashier grey, like a fire which the brightness of the sun put out.'

Then 'travelling' from his birthday, he meets Polly's mother, the woman he had loved:

> 'As you see what the rose was in its faded leaves; as you see what the summer growth of the woods was in their wintry branches; so Polly might be traced, one day, in a careworn woman like this, with her hair turned grey. Before him were the ashes of a dead fire that had once burned bright.'

It is not difficult to see that the image of the grey ashes here, in its connotation and application, is as in Hard Times. Again, as in Dorrit, it also stands for passion, and it is in that common metaphorical sense that Mr. Grewgious employs it in Drood when he tells Edwin "that there can be no coolness, no lassitude, no doubt, no indifference, no half fire and half smoke state of mind, in a real lover". Edwin and Jasper also occasionally gaze at the fire, but Mr. Grewgious does so somewhat consciously:

> "Mr. Edwin, it came into my mind just now, when I was looking at the fire, that I could, in my discretion, acquit myself of that trust at no better time than the present..." (MED, Ch. XI)

After this discussion of the abnormal and dreadful side of fire, it is necessary to treat of its everyday, cheerful aspect, and, of course, the hearth is its most visible form.

As hinted at earlier, fire appears as an agent of comfort in the Sketches and Pickwick, and it is bound to continue as such in the later writings too. Because in a cold country like England the hearth-fire is not only a basic necessity as anywhere else, but also an indispensable companion to the inmates, and hence a uniting bond between them. Dickens regards it as a special asset of the poor:

> 'The ties...which link the poor man to his humble hearth are of the true metal and bear the stamp of heaven.' (OCS, Ch. XXXVIII)

It is from 'love of home' that 'all domestic virtues spring', and it is in 'love of home' that 'the love of country has its rise'. But the picture of home gathers its charm primarily from the hearth:

> 'It was a day to be at home, crowding about the fire, telling stories of travellers who had lost their way in such weather on heaths and moors; and to love a warm hearth more than ever.' (OCS, Ch. LXVII)

The same fact is proved conversely: the ruin of a home is depicted in terms of a dying hearth-fire:

> 'The ashes of the commonest fire are melancholy things, for in them there is an image of death and ruin, - of something that has been bright, and is but dull, cold, dreary dust, - with which our nature forces us to sympathise. How much more sad the crumbled embers of a home:' (BR, Ch. LXXXI)

Perhaps the description of the forge in Chuzzlewit best captures the spirit of jollity and good cheer which a fire can infuse into the company round it:

> 'Then the village forge came out in all its bright importance. The lusty bellows roared Ha ha! to the clear fire, which roared in turn, and bade the shining sparks dance gaily to the merry clinking of the hammers on the anvil. The gleaming iron, in its emulation, sparkled too, and shed its red-hot gems around profusely. The strong smith and his men dealt such strokes upon their work, as made even the melancholy night rejoice; and brought a glow into its dark face as it hovered about the door and windows, peeping curiously in above the shoulders of a dozen loungers. As to this idle company, there they stood, spellbound by the place, and, casting now and then a glance upon the darkness in their rear, settled their lazy elbows more at ease upon the sill, and leaned a little further then: no more disposed to tear themselves away, than if they had been born to cluster round the blazing hearth like so many crickets.' (MC, Ch. II)

What the hearth-fire is to home, the forge-fire is to village.[1]

In fact the fire is a measure of the socialibility of spirit. What Scrooge allows himself and others illustrates this:

> 'Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part.' (A Christmas Carol)

But after his conversion to the Christmas creed, Scrooge says to his clerk: "Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

In The Cricket on the Hearth Dickens further connects the images that depict a happy home. The clock strikes, the kettle sings, and the cricket chirps, but not before 'the jolly blaze' uprises and falls, 'flashing and gleaming', so that 'the snug small home and the crisp fire' go together.

Tackleton's conception of home is, however, entirely different from the Peerybingles':

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1. The scene of the annual Christmas dinner in Great Expectations is Joe Gargery's, perhaps because it is representative of the village festivities.

"Bah! what's home?... Four walls and a ceiling!... There are four walls and a ceiling at my house. Come to me!"

While Dot thinks that to have a cricket on the hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world, Tackleton believes in scrunching it. Thus the hearth-fire with its romantic associations has no place in an ungenerous way of life.

Thus it is not without significance that fire appears in the Christmas tales. It is the central point of indoor felicity which they celebrate. In The Battle of Life Alfred Heathfield returns home from foreign parts:

> 'The day arrived... A day to make home doubly home. To give the chimney corner new delights. To shed a ruddier glow upon the faces gathered round the hearth; and draw each fire-side group into a closer and more social league, against the roaring elements without.'

It is also the starting point of the whole fun. Doctor Jeddler urges again and again, 'Pile up the fire here!' -

> 'And the fire was piled up, and the lights were bright, and company arrived, and a murmuring of lively tongues began, and already there was a pleasant air of cheerful excitement stirring through all the house.'

Naturally the fire image stimulates memories of home, and even determines individual happiness. Pip at Satis House wishes to be with Joe 'in the honest old forge':

> 'Many a time of an evening, when I sat alone looking at the fire, I thought, after all there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home.' (GE, Ch. XXXIV)

Closely connected with home is Christmas, the symbol of social cheer and practical benevolence. It is the realization of that ideal state of bliss which home promises. Home and Christmas signify mysterious charm:

'And though home is a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit answered to, in strongest conjuration.' (MC, Ch. XXXV)

'There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas. Petty jealousies and discords are forgotten: social feelings are awakened in bosoms to which they have been long strangers'

'And thus the evening passes, in a strain of rational goodwill and cheerfulness, doing more to awaken the sympathies of every member of the party in behalf of his neighbour, and to perpetuate their good feeling during the ensuing year, than all the homilies that have ever been written, by all the divines that have ever lived.' (SB, 'A Christmas Dinner')

And all the 'bluff and hearty honesty' of Christmas, all the 'merriment and open-heartedness' of home, essentially hovers about the hearth:[1]

'Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days, that can recal to the old man the pleasures of his youth, and transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of miles away, back to his own fire-side and his quiet home!' (PP, Ch. XXVIII)

The Christmas Books and the Christmas Stories only illustrate didactically the wish expressed in the Sketches: 'Would that Christmas lasted the whole year through...and that the prejudices and passions which deform our better nature, were never called into action among those to whom they should ever be strangers.'

The barriers erected by formal behaviour and the restraints imposed by normal life break down for a season, and a spirit of goodwill and cheerfulness flows through. This is what is proper to Christmas time. But there is a change to be marked from Great Expectations onwards when a certain sombreness descends on the Christmas prospect. The dinner party at the Gargerys' rises from the

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1. The Christmas numbers of Household Words for 1852 and 1853 each contained a round of stories by 'the Christmas fire'.

table in confusion as a file of soldiers arrives at the door-step. Similarly there are extraordinary gloom and pathos in the later Christmas stories, particularly Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings and Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions. The last of these, No Thoroughfare, which Dickens wrote in 1867, in collaboration with Wilkie Collins, goes even further. In its ACT III, "In the Valley,"[1] Obenreizer makes an attempt on Vendale's life in the snows of the Simplon. Thus thoughts of murder come to vitiate the Christmas atmosphere to which the story is specially subscribed, and this directly points the way to Drood, coming three years later.

Dickens first strikes the Christmas note in his last novel in the usual way but with a touch of 'Angularity'. Accepting Rosa's request to see her at Christmas, Mr. Grewgious betrays his lack of enthusiasm for the occasion. He says he does not fit smoothly into the social circle, and therefore he has no other engagement at Christmas time than to partake of a boiled turkey and celery sauce with his clerk, the fowl being sent as a present to himself by the latter's father.

Later, however, this note deepens, but in an entirely different context. Durdles and Jasper are about to ascend the great Tower of the Cathedral, and they begin to talk about 'the old uns'. Durdles asks him if he thinks there may be Ghosts of things like cries and screeches. He then relates the previous year's experience:

> "And here I fell asleep. And what woke me? The ghost of a cry. The ghost of one terrific shriek, which shriek was followed by the ghost of the howl of a dog: a long dismal woeful

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1. Dickens wrote this part. See Christmas Stories, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 'Notes', p. xxii.

howl, such as a dog gives when a person's dead. That was my last Christmas Eve." (MED, Ch. XII)

Christmas Eve is further described in Chapter XIV, entitled 'When Shall These Three Meet Again?' -

> 'Christmas Eve in Cloisterham. A few strange faces in the streets; a few other faces, half strange and half familiar, once the faces of Cloisterham children, now the faces of men and women who come back from the outerworld at long intervals to find the city wonderfully shrunken in size, as if it had not washed by any means well in the meanwhile. To these, the striking of the Cathedral clock, and the cawing of the rooks from the Cathedral tower, are like voices of their nursery time. To such as these it has happened in their dying hours afar off, that they have imagined their chamber floor to be strewn with the autumnal leaves fallen from the elm trees in the Close: so have the rustling sounds and fresh scents of their earliest impressions, revived, when the circle of their lives was very nearly traced, and the beginning and the end were drawing close together.' (Ibid., Ch. XIV)

The resultant impression is that of a 'presented' turkey, a terrific cry followed by a long howl of a dog, and the beginning and the end of life drawing close together, and this impression is augmented by allusions to Macbeth[1] which evoke an atmosphere of evil omen and treacherous mystery. A gale of unprecedented fury hits Cloisterham. The hands of the Cathedral clock are torn off, lead from the Cathedral roof is stripped away, and some stones upon the summit of the great Cathedral tower are displaced. That is how Christmas morning finds the Cathedral.

There are other ghosts here than the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come. No spirits of the Chimes of the church bells are here, no Chirps of the Cricket on the Hearth. All the imagined beauty of form and sound is fled. Instead,

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1. The storm described at the end of Chapter XIV is forecast in its adapted title, 'When Shall These Three Meet Again?' Further, perhaps the rooks in the Cathedral tower suggest the martlets in Macbeth's castle.

the air is thick with whispers of 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'.

It is significant that the fire image does not appear in the depiction of Christmas above. There is no merry glow of the hearth, and hence no hearty mirth of company. The dinner Jasper gives Edwin and Neville at the Gate House is not described at all. Both the guests and the host get there one by one, so that the single-sentence paragraph is repeated three times - 'And so he goes up the postern stair.' That leaves much to the reader's imagination, but there are clear hints that the dinner must have been a cheerless affair. First, Neville tells Helena that he does not like going to it, because there is 'a strange dead weight...in the air'. Then after a dull day Edwin hears from 'the Princess Puffer' the ominous news that 'Ned' is a threatened name, and 'when he walks over the bridge and by the river, the woman's words are in the rising wind, in the angry sky, in the troubled air, in the flickering lights'.

A festive spirit cannot break into such states of mind, can never indeed when a nature like Jasper's plays the host.

A murder in a Cathedral and on Christmas Eve! The theme, the place, and the time appear to be complete travesty of almost all earlier work. One wonders if 'Boz' would any longer wish Christmas to last 'the whole year through'.

Summing up, it can be said that just as Dickens is conscious of the mysterious and devouring nature of the element, exactly so he is appreciative of its comforting and socializing character. This is generally clear from his treatment of it as a good servant and a bad master. Tamed for the hearth it is capable of stimulating a solitary

gazer's imagination and even of setting one's sensibility and consciousness in a divining key, as well as of infusing a spirit of jollity and open-heartedness into company. Tamed for the furnace it hits back viciously and subtly, scorching and suffocating life, indeed drying up its very founts, in man and in nature. Humoured and fed in its master's role, it works havoc with a fiendish glee, inspiring its attendants and waiters with savagery and madness.

What is more important is that Dickens has exploited the fire image in all its various shades and associations in the interests of art. Setting, situation, atmosphere, character, action, all get sustenance from it. Equally important is the 'ritual' of fire-gazing: it creates an air of mystery as well as a sense of imminence, so that while the one captivates the reader's imagination inexplicably, the other urges his interest pointedly on.

Another interesting thing is that occasionally Dickens likes to go deeper into the nature of the element. In fact his sense of it is very intense, and at times there are even philosophical touches. In Our Mutual Friend[1] he notes that fire 'helps to sustain' 'the higher animal and vegetable life', and in Drood[2] he shows Durdles lighting his lantern, 'by drawing from the cold hard wall a spark of that mysterious fire which lurks in everything'. This sounds almost Heraclitean.

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1. Bk. I, Ch. XIV.
2. Ch. XII.

5 - 'CREATION'S MIND'

'The light, creation's mind, was everywhere...'

- The Old Curiosity Shop

The metaphorical senses of light are many and various. Reason, knowledge, hope, love, faith, truth, God, all have been connected with it since ages, and Dickens has suggested this connexion in his work in his own way. But more important is the fact that light has been shed on particular settings, scenes, and characters for artistic rather than rhetorical effect. As usual there has been at work a gradual process of development which appears to start with Mr. Pickwick viewing the beautiful surroundings of the Medway in the morning light, and 'the dismal man' arriving to exclaim:

> "Ah! people need to rise early, to see the sun in all his splendour, for his brightness seldom lasts the day through. The morning of day and the morning of life are but too much alike." (PP, Ch. V)

This comparison between day and life, in a rather Wordsworthian tone, is carried forward as such when 'the dismal man' reviews the common saying, 'The morning's too fine to last':

> "How well might it be applied to our every-day existence. God! what would I forfeit to have the days of my childhood restored, or to be able to forget them for ever!" (Ibid.)

This light of innocence, which attends on childhood, in time gives place to the darkness which gathers over sin. Nancy lies dead in a pool of blood, and Sikes sits in the room afraid to stir. And the sun rises to stare the criminal out of countenance:

'The sun - the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone,

> but new life, and hope, and freshness to man - burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray. It lighted up the room where the murdered woman lay. It did. He tried to shut it out, but it would stream in.' (OT, Ch. XLVIII)

Sikes cannot bear the sight of his own handiwork. He tries to shut out light, because it gives him the lie. But strangely enough, light is the one need of Fagin in the condemned cell:

> 'It was very dark; why didn't they bring a light? The cell had been built for many years. Scores of men must have passed their last hours there. It was like sitting in a vault strewn with dead bodies - the cap, the noose, the pinioned arms, the faces that he knew, even beneath that hideous veil. - Light, light!' (OT, Ch. LII)

Fagin's Lady Macbeth-like craving for light in the dark and Sikes's dread of it in the day are two facets of the same sense of guilt. Evil quenches the light within, so that the soul has to grope for it without. But it cannot face the overwhelming divine splendour of the sun which routs all darkness; it only looks for some little man-made prop like a lamp or a candle.

Under Little Nell's gaze of purity and innocence a morning scene puts on an altogether different look:

> 'The town was glad with morning light; places that had shown ugly and distrustful all night long, now wore a smile; and sparkling sunbeams dancing on chamber windows, and twinkling through blind and curtain before sleepers' eyes, shed light even **into** dreams, and chased away the shadows of the night... Men in their dungeons stretched their cramp cold limbs and cursed the stone that no bright sky could warm. The flowers that sleep by night, opened their gentle eyes and turned them to the day. The light, creation's mind, was everywhere, and all things owned its power.' (OCS, Ch. XV)

That is a Wordsworthian hymn to nature, the profound touch in the last sentence marking the climax of devotion. Dickens appears to celebrate the escape of Nell and her grandfather from their oppressors

in London, and sets the 'two pilgrims' on the road with an initial note of good cheer.

Light is again brought to bear upon the theme of murder in a tale in Master Humphrey's Clock. The criminal, formerly an army lieutenant, slays his orphaned nephew in broad daylight:

> 'The sun burst forth from behind a cloud; it shone in the bright sky, the glistening earth, the clear water, the sparkling drops of rain upon the leaves. There were eyes in everything. The whole great universe of light was there to see the murder done.' (MHC, 'The Clock-case')

Then comes the guilty burial:

> 'I buried him that night. When I parted the boughs and looked into the dark thicket, there was a glow-worm shining like the visible spirit of God upon the murdered child. I glanced down into his grave when I had placed him there and still it gleamed upon his breast: an eye of fire looking up to Heaven in supplication to the stars that watched me at my work.' (Ibid.)

Here, as in Oliver, Dickens suggests a contrast between light and the darkness that fills a murderer's soul, and Jonas in Chuzzlewit is another and more elaborate illustration. There is 'a Guilty Deed' 'drawing on towards its black accomplishment':

> 'But the fatality was of his own working; the pit was of his own digging; the gloom that gathered round him, was the shadow of his own life.' (MC, Ch. XLVI)

The firmer the dreadful design grows, the blacker the prospect becomes:

> 'It was now growing dark. As the gloom of evening, deepening into night, came on, another dark shade emerging from within him seemed to overspread his face, and slowly change it. Slowly, slowly; darker and darker; more and more haggard; creeping over him by little and little; until it was black night within him and without.' (Ibid.)

A day before the deed, light and darkness begin to cut sharper into Jonas's consciousness:

> 'The sun was welcome to him. There were life, and motion,

> and a world astir, to divide the attention of Day. It was the eye of Night...that he dreaded most. There is no glare in the night. Even Glory shows to small advantage in the night, upon a crowded battle-field. How then shows Glory's blood-relation, bastard Murder!' (MC, Ch. XLVII)

'Glory' and 'Glory's blood-relation, bastard Murder' join in the name of religion and assume the systematic form of the Inquisition. The hellish darkness of the ruined dungeons, which that august body filled with torture and death, is defeated by the blessed radiance of the sun:

> 'My blood ran cold, as I looked...down into the vaults, where these forgotten creatures, with recollections of the world outside: of wives, friends, children, brothers: starved to death, and made the stones ring with their unavailing groans. But the thrill I felt on seeing the accursed wall below, decayed and broken through, and the sun shining in through its gaping wounds, was like a sense of victory and triumph. I felt exalted with the proud delight of living in these degenerate times, to see it. As if I were the hero of some high achievement! The light in the doleful vaults was typical of the light that has streamed in, on all persecution in God's name, but which is not yet at its noon! It cannot look more lovely to a blind man newly restored to sight, than to a traveller who sees it, calmly and majestically, treading down the darkness of that Infernal Well.' (PI, 'Lyons, the Rhone,...')

This extraordinarily strong impression shows itself again, only a dozen lines later:

> 'I walked round the building on the outside, in a sort of dream, and yet with the delightful sense of having awakened from it, of which the light, down in the vaults, had given me the assurance. The immense thickness and giddy height of the walls, the enormous strength of the massive towers, the great extent of the building, its gigantic proportions, frowning aspect, and barbarous irregularity, awaken awe and wonder... I could think of little, however, then, or long afterwards, but the sun in the dungeons. The palace coming down to be the lounging-place of noisy soldiers, and being forced to echo their rough talk, and common oaths, and to have their garments fluttering from its dirty windows, was some reduction of its state, and something to rejoice at; but the day in its cells, and the sky for the roof of its chambers of cruelty - that was its desolation and defeat! If I had seen it in a blaze from ditch to rampart, I should have felt that not that light, nor all the light in all the fire that burns, could waste it, like the sunbeams in its secret council-chamber, and its prisons.' (PI, 'Avignon to Genoa')

Thus in Dickens's eyes a calm strip of sunlight is a far greater purger and router of tyranny than even the greatest of conflagrations. Again, he makes a distinction between the light which fire emits and the light which 'the noble sun' sends down from the heavens. Sunlight exposes and defeats evil as firelight never can.

Light has so far appeared in the refreshing context of nature, or against the murderous background of abnormal human behaviour, individual as well as collective, and obviously it has been symbolic of good as darkness has been of evil. Of course this same suggestive basis continues throughout, but from Dombey onwards Dickens increasingly applies it to normal characters of everyday life, and in them he appears to realize the spirit of the 'dismal' man's remark about childhood. A streak or ray of light comes to attend on all those who have a touch of unearthly blessedness in their natures. The contrast between Mr. Dombey and his children is depicted in typical Wordsworthian terms:

> 'If any sunbeam stole into the room to light the children at their play, it never reached his face. He looked on so fixedly and coldly, that the warm light vanished even from the laughing eyes of little Florence, when, at last, they happened to meet his.' (DS, Ch. V)

Paul has an extraordinarily powerful imagination, and light marks its reminiscent activity:

> 'He had to think of a portrait on the stairs, which always looked earnestly after him as he went away, eyeing it over his shoulder... He had much to think of, in association with a print that hung up in another place, where, in the centre of a wondering group, one figure that he knew, a figure with a light about its head - benignant, mild, and merciful - stood pointing upward.' (DS, Ch. XIV)

The significance of 'a light' and 'pointing upward' is evident,

and the touch is repeated in Paul's last words:

> "Mamma is like you, Floy. I know her by the face! But tell them that the print upon the stairs at school is not divine enough. The light about the head is shining on me as I go!" (DS, Ch. XVI)

Mr. Dombey's 'great dreary house' with its 'monstrous fantasy of rusty iron...bearing, on either side, two ominous extinguishers' is approached in Dantean style: "Who enter here, leave light behind!" But there is a light in this infernal abode, sometimes stealing into Mr. Dombey's own rooms, and that is Florence:

> 'Florence stole into those rooms at twilight, early in the morning, and at times when meals were served downstairs. And although they were in every nook the better and the brighter for her care, she entered and passed out as quietly as any sunbeam, excepting that she left her light behind.' (DS, Ch. XXIII)

And indeed this is the light which shines on Mr. Dombey when he lies low in the pit of his own making. It is not he; it is a 'spectral, haggard, wasted likeness of himself' that broods and broods over the empty fireplace, and arrives at the brink of suicide:

> 'It sat down, with its eyes upon the empty fireplace, and as it lost itself in thought there shone into the room a gleam of light; a ray of sun.' (DS, Ch. LIX)

Of course this radiance flows in with Florence. Rescued from the hell of self-extinction, the father is gradually won back into the light of life by filial affection:

> 'With that he dropped his head again, lamenting over and caressing her, and there was not a sound in all the house for a long, long time; they remaining clasped in one another's arms, in the glorious sunshine that had crept in with Florence.' (DS, Ch. LIX)

One can hardly imagine how a character like Carker could be visualized in the same sunlight which adorns the angelic figures of Paul and Florence. But such a feat is typical of the artist in

Dickens. The sharp, stealthy cunning of the cat combined with its craving for leisurely warmth gives Carker a place in the sun:

> 'Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr. Carker the Manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the skylight, playing his game alone.
>
> 'And although it is not among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr. Carker the Manager, as he basked in the strip of summer-light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr. Carker the Manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.' (DS, Ch. XXII)

It is interesting that the rays of the sun are shown to come down 'slanting' on Carker, and that he is seen playing at cards. Thus although the portrayal is in terms of light, it does not in the least convey any genial or even agreeable impression. In fact the character has been so saturated with felinity that the effect is entirely contrary.

Later, however, Dickens shows him in a different light. Fleeing before Mr. Dombey from France to England, he passes a dreadfully disturbed night in a tavern at a country station. In the morning he comes out only to be crushed under a railway engine, with his pursuer looking on:

> 'After a glance at the place where he had walked last night, and at the signal-lights burning feebly in the morning, and bereft of their significance, he turned to where the sun was rising, and beheld it, in its glory, as it broke upon the scene.
>
> 'So awful, so transcendent in its beauty, so divinely solemn.

> As he cast his faded eyes upon it, where it rose, tranquil and serene, unmoved by all the wrong and wickedness on which its beams had shone since the beginning of the world, who shall say that some weak sense of virtue upon Earth, and its reward in Heaven, did not manifest itself, even to him? If ever he remembered sister or brother with a touch of tenderness and remorse, who shall say it was not then?
>
> 'He needed some such touch then. Death was on him. He was marked off from the living world, and going down into his grave.' (DS, Ch. LVI)

It is the same sun which revealed the feline in him before, but its rays now give him a 'touch' of sad compassion in an eternal context.

The world of Copperfield is variously lit: sunlight, moonlight, candle-light, all appear significantly here. The healing influence, which showed itself in filial affection in Dombey now passes into friendship and love and matrimony. Miss Trotwood takes David to Mr. Wickfield's where he is to board. The boy first sees Agnes there and she leads them up to his room:

> 'I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained-glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and that I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards.' (DC, Ch. XV)

A picture of present experience is fitted into a frame of vague reminiscence, and, what is more, in view of the shape of things to come:

> 'I love little Em'ly, and I don't love Agnes - no, not at all in that way - but I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the coloured window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around.' (DC, Ch. XVI)

Not without reason David calls Agnes his good Angel, and this

title she accepts only to warn him against his bad Angel, Steerforth.

Finally, Chapter LXIII, which opens to show the broken David approach Agnes as a lover, and which ends with their marriage, is significantly entitled 'A light shines on my way'.

The moonlight figures here only as a remnant of Dombey. David, sitting in his new room at his aunt's and looking out towards the sea, points back to Paul in the window at Dr. Blimber's:

> 'The room was a pleasant one, at the top of the house, overlooking the sea, on which the moon was shining brilliantly. After I had said my prayers, and the candle had burnt out, I remember how I still sat looking at the moonlight on the water, as if I could hope to read my fortune in it, as in a bright book.' (DC, Ch. XIII)

While the moonlight on the heaving waters mysteriously connects the living with the remote in future or in eternity, the candle in the window of the old boat directs the homecoming to the home. Mr. Peggotty says to David,

> "Theer!...Lighted up, accordin' to custom! You're a wonderin' what that's fur, Sir! Well, it's fur our little Em'ly. You see, the path ain't over light or cheerful arter dark; and when I'm here at the hour as she's a comin' home, I puts the light in the winder. That, you see,...meets two objects. She says, says Em'ly, 'Theer's home!' she says. And likewise, says Em'ly, 'My uncle's theer!' Fur if I ain't theer, I never have no light showed." (DC, Ch. XXXI)

So the candle is not only a guide to safety, it is also a beacon of affection, and its image gains in point and power through repeated emphasis. Mr. Peggotty continues:

> "Why, this here candle now!... I know wery well that when I'm here o' nights...and she ain't here, or I ain't theer, I shall put the candle in the winder, and sit afore the fire, pretending I'm expecting of her, like I'm a doing now... Why, at the present minute, when I see the candle sparkle up, I says to myself, 'She's a looking at it! Em'ly's a coming!'... Right for all that...fur here she is!" (Ibid.)

But the moment is only charged with irony and shock, for actually

it is Ham bringing the news of her elopement with Steerforth. However, the misfortune does not affect the candle adversely; on the other hand, it acquires a new significance. Representing Mr. Peggotty's steadfast devotion to Em'ly, it becomes a symbol of hope for fallen women:

> "Every night...as reg'lar as the night comes, the candle must be stood in its old pane of glass, that if ever she should see it, it may seem to say 'Come back, my child, come back!' If ever there's a knock, Ham...arter dark, at your aunt's door, doen't you go nigh it. Let it be her - not you - that sees my fallen child!" (DC, Ch. XXXII)

At last Mr. Peggotty finds his 'fallen child' and receives her with open arms:

> 'That night, for the first time in all those many nights, the candle was taken out of the window, Mr. Peggotty swung in his old hammock in the old boat, and the wind murmured with the old sound round his head.' (DC, Ch. LI)

The candle achieves the end it has stood for all along, and therefore it is taken out of the window.

Bleak House is perhaps the richest of Dickens's novels in poetic effect, and this primarily depends upon its atmosphere of half-lights. The judicial, legal, social, and family scenes, all reveal a varied interplay of light and shade.

In the High Court of Chancery 'a large advocate' contemplates 'the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog', and 'the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it', and

> 'Well may the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained glass windows lose their colour, and admit no light of day into the place.' (BH, Ch. I)

The lights hopelessly struggling against the fog obviously connote that no good can come of all that is being said and done, that all grub on in a muddle.

The figure of Mr. Tulkinghorn, another representative of the law, is realized in the same key:

> 'One peculiarity of his black clothes, of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is, that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself.' (BH, Ch. II)

The dress suggests the man, and the imperviousness of each to light only reveals a secretive and ungenerous character.

Social misery is also exposed to view in subdued, even stifled light. The burial of Nemo concludes with an invocation that is as significant as eloquent:

> 'Come night, come darkness, for you cannot come too soon, or stay too long, by such a place as this! Come, straggling lights into the windows of the ugly houses; and you who do iniquity therein, do it at least with this dread scene shut out! Come, flame of gas, burning so sullenly above the iron gate, on which the poisoned air deposits its witch-ointment slimy to the touch! It is well that you should call to every passer-by, "Look here!"' (BH, Ch. XI)

With the night, comes the slouching figure of Jo, moving up to the iron gate. Holding the gate with his hands, looking in between the bars, he stands for a little while. Then with an old broom he carries, he softly sweeps the step, and makes the archway clean. He looks in again, a little while, and so departs:

> 'Jo, is it thou? Well, well! Though a rejected witness, who "can't exactly say" what will be done to him in greater hands than men's, thou art not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this:
>
> "He wos wery good to me, he wos!"' (BH, Ch. XI)

The poor, unctuous light is up against the night of injustice and

wickedness in its own way, but perhaps 'a distant ray of light' best dispels 'outer darkness', because a sincere expression of thankfulness is as elevating as a sincere act of kindness, and in this two-fold activity lies the Dickensian idea of human salvation.

The 'ray' image recurs when the common link between all classes of society is investigated:

> 'What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard step?' (BH, Ch. XVI)

The 'connexion' is a positive physical fact, visible in the very condition of creation, and its recognition is truth, its denial falsehood. The 'distant ray of light' attending on Jo alone, suggests his moral and spiritual superiority over the social set-up which refuses to see 'the connexion' between itself and him, which can subject him to its detective 'bull's eye'[1] in full glare, but which has failed to give him even a spark of simple faith. For in his delirium of death he finds the way dark before him. There is Allan Woodcourt by the bedside, helping him with his first and last prayer:

> '"Thank'ee sir. Thank'ee, sir. They'll have to get the key of the gate afore they can take me in, for it's allus locked. And there's a step there, as I used fur to clean with my broom. - It's turned wery dark, sir. Is there any light a-coming?"
>
> .....
>
> "I hear you, sir, in the dark, but I'm a-groping - a-groping - let me catch hold of your hand."
>
> .....

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1. Bleak House, Chapter XXII: 'Mr. Bucket throws his light into the doorway... Jo stands in the disc of light, like a ragged figure in a magic lanthorn, trembling to think that he has offended against the law by not having moved on far enough.'

"Our Father! yes, that's wery good, sir."

.....

"Art in Heaven - is the light a-coming, sir?"

.....

"Hallowed be - thy - "

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!' (BH, Ch. XLVII)

Much the greater part of the poetry in Bleak House hovers about the figure of Lady Dedlock, and almost invariably its best specimens are woven from an intermingling of light and shade.

It is through a 'cold sunshine' and a sharp wind that Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock start for home in their travelling chariot. Paris is flung back into the distance:

> 'the Gate of the Star a white speck glittering in the sun, and the city a mere mound in a plain: two dark square towers rising out of it, and light and shadow descending on it aslant, like the angels in Jacob's dream!' (BH, Ch. XII)

And Chesney Wold prepares to welcome them:

> 'The clear cold sunshine glances into the brittle woods, and approvingly beholds the sharp wind scattering the leaves and drying the moss. It glides over the park after the moving shadows of the clouds, and chases them, and never catches them, all day. It looks in at the windows, and touches the ancestral portraits with bars and patches of brightness, never contemplated by the painters. Athwart the picture of my Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that strikes down crookedly into the hearth, and seems to rend it.' (BH, Ch. XII)

The outdoor imperceptibly merges in the indoor, and the reader's eye is wooingly led from 'the brittle woods' to 'the hearth', only to halt there with a shudder, for the last sentence is full of dark forebodings. It is not at all difficult to see that the beauty and charm of the entire pattern depend upon 'the clear cold sunshine' which not

only gives it a unity, but also invests it with an ominous power. Perhaps Lady Dedlock's real character, as well as the coming shame of the Dedlock family through her, can be read in the suggestion - both incident and reflected - that light evokes from her portrait. The same impression is created again when Sir Leicester is laid up with 'the family gout':

> 'And a goodly show he makes, lying in a flush of crimson and gold, in the midst of the great drawing-room, before his favourite picture of my Lady, with broad strips of sunlight shining in, down the long perspective, through the long line of windows, and alternating with soft reliefs of shadow.' (BH, Ch. XVI)

But it is later that the full spirit of poetic glory is caught in the magic web of half-lights. Chesney Wold is seen in the dying hues of the sunset and under the haunting breath of the moonlight:

> 'Through some of the fiery windows, beautiful from without, and set, at this sunset hour not in dull grey stone, but in a glorious house of gold, the light excluded at other windows pours in, rich, lavish, overflowing like the summer plenty in the land. Then do the frozen Dedlocks thaw...
>
> 'But the fire of the sun is dying. Even now the floor is dusky, and shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death. And now, upon my Lady's picture over the great chimney-piece, a weird shade falls from some old tree, that turns it pale, and flutters it, and looks as if a great arm held a veil or hood, watching an opportunity to draw it over her. Higher and darker rises shadow on the wall - now a red gloom on the ceiling - now the fire is out.
>
> .....
>
> 'Now, the moon is high; and the great house, needing habitation more than ever, is like a body without life... Now is the time for every shadow... But, of all the shadows in Chesney Wold, the shadow in the long drawing-room upon my Lady's picture is the first to come, the last to be disturbed. At this hour and by this light it changes into threatening hands raised up, and menacing the handsome face with every breath that stirs.' (BH, Ch. XL)

Light and shade mingle here in exquisite richness and variety,

and the old ominous touch is there, much more pronounced than before.

Thus it is by lowering the lights in Chancery, about Tom-all-Alone's, and over Chesney Wold that Dickens succeeds in creating a mysterious and poetic atmosphere in Bleak House.

The texture of Hard Times is significantly coloured by sunlight, firelight and starlight, each in its own way pointing back to precedents.

That genial ray of light which attended on Florence and Agnes, attends on Sissy, but the symbolic intent here is much more pointed and the pattern far more complex. Sissy and Bitzer are portrayed as they sit in the same sunbeam:

> 'The square finger, moving here and there, lighted suddenly on Bitzer, perhaps because he chanced to sit in the same ray of sunlight which, darting in at one of the bare windows of the intensely whitewashed room, irradiated Sissy. For, the boys and girls sat on the face of the inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the centre by a narrow interval; and Sissy, being at the corner of a row on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer, being at the corner of a row on the other side, a few rows in advance, caught the end. But, whereas the girl was so dark-eyed and dark-haired, that she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun, when it shone upon her, the boy was so light-eyed and light-haired that the self-same rays appeared to draw out of him what little colour he ever possessed. His cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed their form. His short-cropped hair might have been a mere continuation of the sandy freckles on his forehead and face. His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if it were cut, he would bleed white.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. II)

Two characters, one a creature of Fancy and the other of Fact, are revealed in the 'equal ray' of the sun: Sissy favourably, Bitzer unfavourably; and this at the strategic moment when his superiority in statistical knowledge is being established over her. The pattern

appears to be a resultant of the portraits of Florence and Carker in Dombey.

Sissy continues to shine, although in a subdued way, even in the midst of the Gradgrinds. When Louisa agrees to marry Bounderby, she is sure of Sissy's surprise at her decision, and so she changes to her. But when her marriage fails, and she returns finally to her father, she is in need of sympathy, and she wants 'a guide to peace, contentment, honour'. And only the stroller's child can be all that:

> 'In the innocence of her brave affection, and brimming up of her old devoted spirit, the once deserted girl shone like a beautiful light upon the darkness of the other.' (HT, Bk. III, Ch. I)

Dickens employs light and darkness alternately to depict Coketown. The day exposes its filth and smoke:

> 'A sunny midsummer day. There was such a thing sometimes, even in Coketown.
>
> 'Seen from a distance in such weather, Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays. You only knew the town was there, because you knew there could have been no such sulky blotch upon the prospect without a town. A blur of soot and smoke, now confusedly tending this way, now that way, now aspiring to the vault of Heaven, now murkily creeping along the earth, as the wind rose and fell, or changed its quarter: a dense formless jumble, with sheets of cross light in it, that showed nothing but masses of darkness:- Coketown in the distance was suggestive of itself, though not a brick of it could be seen.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. I)

Even the rare light from the heavens undergoes a disagreeable transformation, and reveals the unwholesome aspect and injurious spirit of industrial activity. And the night shows smoke turning into fire, the factories with the lights in them like Fairy palaces, and then everything lost in darkness. The prospect is realized through Mrs. Sparsit's eyes:

> 'She sat at the window, when the sun began to sink behind the smoke; she sat there, when the smoke was burning red, when the

> colour faded from it, when darkness seemed to rise slowly out of the ground, and creep upward, upward, up to the house-tops, up the church steeple, up to the summits of the factory chimneys, up to the sky.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. I)

Starlight figures in the context of death and redemption. Stephen Blackpool has fallen into the Old Hell Shaft, and lain helplessly there for long, long hours of pain. Then help arrives, and he is extricated from the predicament. He asks Rachel to 'look up yonder':

> 'Following his eyes, she saw that he was gazing at a star.
>
> "It ha' shined upon me," he said reverently, "in my pain and trouble down below. It ha' shined into my mind. I ha' look'n at 't and thowt o' thee, Rachel, till the muddle in my mind have cleared awa, above a bit, I hope... In my pain an trouble, looking up yonder, - wi' it shinin' on me - I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom toogether more, an get a better unnerstan'in o' one another, than when I were in't my own weak seln."' (HT, Bk. III, Ch. VI)

And he believes it to be the Star of Bethlehem:

> "Often as I coom to myseln, and found it shinin on me down there in my trouble, I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour's home. I awmust think it be the very star!" (Ibid.)

Then as he is being carried in a litter, he expires:

> 'The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer's rest.' (Ibid.)

This is the tone of a Christmas tale,[1] and the fact that Stephen forgives those who have wronged him - he wrongly believes that Louisa has been in league with Tom -, confirms it. But Stephen's eyes have not been directed upwards just now. Long before, when one night he had seen a candle burning in the window, and found Rachel tending his

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1. A Christmas Carol: Marley's Ghost says to Scrooge: "Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode."

wild drunken wife, his mind had contemplated the stars:

> 'As the shining stars were to the heavy candle in the window, so was Rachel, in the rugged fancy of this man, to the common experiences of his life.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. XIII)

Actually therefore his need of the Blessed Star symbolizes the need of 'Masters' and 'Hands', all, for a Christian understanding to get out of the 'muddle' of life.

From the half-lights of Bleak House and the black mist and red haze of Hard Times Dickens moves into the dazzling white stare and the dark imprisoned shade of Dorrit:

> 'A blazing sun upon a fierce August day... Everything in Marseilles, and about Marseilles, had stared at the fervid sky, and been stared at in return, until a staring habit had become universal there. Strangers were stared out of countenance by staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring tracts of arid road, staring hills from which verdure was burnt away...' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. I)

There is the other side of this universal glare:

> 'In Marseilles that day there was a villainous prison. In one of its chambers, so repulsive a place that even the obtrusive stare blinked at it, and left it to such refuse of reflected light as it could find for itself, were two men...
>
> 'It received such light as it got, through a grating of iron bars, fashioned like a pretty large window...
>
> '...The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damps, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. ...Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside...' (Ibid.)

This contrast between free light and detained darkness continues throughout. In Marseilles the sun is oppressive, and the prison a criminal's, but in London the sun is glorious, and the prison a debtor's. One night, in the Marshalsea, William Dorrit complains that Chivery has not been so 'obliging and attentive' as before, and he becomes despondent:

> "Amy...I tell you, if you could see me as your mother saw me, you wouldn't believe it to be the creature you have only looked at through the bars of this cage. I was young, I was accomplished, I was good-looking, I was independent - by God I was, Child! - and people sought me out, and envied me. Envied me!" (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XIX)

Amy consoles him and never leaves him all that night. When the morning comes, she creeps up to her garret:

> 'As she gently opened the window, and looked eastward down the prison yard, the spikes upon the wall were tipped with red, then made a sullen purple pattern on the sun as it came flaming up into the heavens. The spikes had never looked so sharp and cruel, nor the bars so heavy, nor the prison space so gloomy and contracted. She thought of the sunrise on rolling rivers, of the sunrise on wide seas, of the sunrise on rich landscapes, of the sunrise on great forests where the birds were waking and the trees were rustling; and she looked down into the living grave on which the sun had risen, with her father in it, three-and-twenty years, and said, in a burst of sorrow and compassion, "No, no, I have never seen him in my life!"' (Ibid.)

This depiction of the sunrise recalls the comparison between the morning of day and the morning of life in Pickwick as well as the healing influence of nature emphasized in the Curiosity Shop. Perhaps Little Dorrit's vision of calm glory inspired by her affection for her father also points back to Little Nell's craving for the countryside peace for the sake of her grandfather. But the artistic end here is to present the contrast between freedom and imprisonment, and nothing could serve it better than a striped pattern of light and shade. At Marseilles it is got by putting up 'a grating of iron bars' against 'the universal stare', in London by drawing the sharp spikes and heavy bars against the flaming sun. Its other form is the 'shadow' which appears frequently, in fact and in metaphor. 'Mr. Merdle's complaint' and the Dorrit's misery are both depicted in its terms:

> 'There was no shadow of Mr. Merdle's complaint on the bosom... there was no shadow of Mr. Merdle's complaint on young Sparkler... there was no shadow of Mr. Merdle's complaint on the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings...'

'In the meantime, the shadow of the Marshalsea wall was a real darkening influence, and could be seen on the Dorrit family at any stage of the sun's course.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XXI)

It is this recurrent touch of the shadow that gradually imprints the image of the prison wall on the reader's mind, and holds it up as the real villain of the piece, the climax coinciding with its moment of defeat. Arthur Clennam asks William Dorrit what surprise would be the most unlooked for and the most acceptable to him:

'The sun was bright upon the wall behind the window, and on the spikes at top. He slowly stretched out the hand that had been at his heart, and pointed at the wall.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XXXV)

Clennam says, "It is down...Gone!" But it is down and gone only physically. Because it stays on in William Dorrit's consciousness and in Amy's, even after their accession to fortune.

At last when all is lost again, and Amy comes to know that Arthur is a debtor in the Marshalsea, she goes to nurse him:

'As they sat side by side, in the shadow of the wall, the shadow fell like light upon him.'

'The shadow moved with the sun, but she never moved from his side... The sun went down and she was still there.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XXIX)

The sharp contrast between the sun and the shadow throughout is tempered here with the vision of love so that guidance and hope are sent from above:

'There was one bright star shining in the sky. She looked up at it while she spoke, as if it were the fervent purpose of her own heart shining above her.' (Ibid.)

And then the moment of triumph arrives:

'The last day of the appointed week touched the bars of the Marshalsea gate. Black, all night, since the gate had clashed upon Little Dorrit, its iron stripes were turned by the early-glowing sun into stripes of gold. For aslant across the city, over its jumbled roofs, and through the open tracery of its

> church towers, struck the long bright rays, bars of the prison of this lower world.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XXX)

Plainly enough, the shadow here is symbolic of suffering and ruin, and creates, in a sustained manner, the effect that was only hinted at in Dombey. After the catastrophe Mr. Dombey comes to live with Florence and Walter, and he usually lies upon his bed 'with the window open, looking out at the summer sky and the trees: and, in the evening, at the sunset':

> 'To watch the shadows of the clouds and leaves, and seem to feel a sympathy with shadows. It was natural, that he should. To him, life and the world were nothing else.' (DS, Ch. LXI)

The same effect was realized in an appreciable measure in Bleak House. Rick is 'fighting with shadows and being defeated by them'. He turns into Lincoln's Inn, and passes under the shadow of the Lincoln's Inn trees:

> 'On many such loungers have the speckled shadows of these trees fallen: on the like bent head, the bitten nail, the lowering eye, the lingering step, the purposeless and dreamy air, the good consuming and consumed, the life turned sour.' (BH, Ch. XXXIX)

The shadows in Chesney Wold gathering over the pictures of the dead Dedlocks, at sunset and in moonlight, in general connote the futility of human vanity and the ultimate sway of oblivion, and the shadow upon Lady Dedlock's portrait in particular suggests her approaching shame and death.

As remarked earlier, the effects of light and shade in Dorrit are very much sharper than in these earlier novels. No moon sheds its bewitching beams on Mrs. Clennam's 'dismal old house'. Instead, it itself radiates a heavy gloom of secretiveness all around, so that

the whole neighbourhood can be imagined being under the 'dark tinge' of a dark shadow 'thickening and thickening towards its source'. Thus its eventual collapse can be read as much in these touches suggestive of ruin as in its physical features like the gigantic crutches upon which it is propped.

Not far from these premises is the shadow of the gallows in A Tale of Two Cities which stands 'forty feet high' astride the fountain. The sun is 'going to bed', and the shadow strikes 'across the church, across the mill, across the prison', seems 'to strike across the earth...to where the sky rests upon it'. This prefigures the universal havoc and upheaval that are to grip France, and the suggestion is strengthened by the setting sun which lengthens the shadows and helps the advancing darkness. However, it is more often the sunrise that Dickens charges with symbolic intent in the Tale, and, as in Dorrit, it stands for freedom and life, both in their mundane and sublime sense with Dr. Manette and Sydney Carton as illustrations.

Mr. Lorry, in the mail-coach, awakes from his dream to see the rising sun: 'Though the earth was cold and wet, the sky was clear, and the sun rose bright, placid, and beautiful.' And then he looks at the sun, and exclaims: "Eighteen years!...Gracious Creator of day! To be buried alive for eighteen years!" Of course he reacts to the scene in the context of Doctor Manette's imprisonment. Nevertheless, the Doctor's own sense of pain has associations with the moon. One night he sits with Lucie in his house in Soho under the plane-tree, its mild radiance shining upon their faces through the leaves. This is the eve of her marriage, and the conversation naturally centres

round wedded happiness. Then the Doctor raises his hand towards the moon, and says:

> "See!...I have looked at her from my prison-window, when I could not bear her light. I have looked at her when it has been such torture to me to think of her shining upon what I had lost, that I have beaten my head against my prison-walls. I have looked at her, in a state so dull and lethargic, that I have thought of nothing but the number of horizontal lines I could draw across her at the full, and the number of perpendicular lines with which I could intersect them... It was twenty either way, I remember, and the twentieth was difficult to squeeze in." (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. XVII)

The Doctor's imprisonment is different from William Dorrit's in that it is much more than a loss of freedom, and marks the end of a newly-acquired marital union and an unfulfilled parental affection. Thus the moon, as a symbol of maddening passion, makes a far fitter background for the barred prison-window than the sun. Dickens strikes a profound note, and full significantly, when he shows both father and daughter in the moonlight - she is to suffer in her own way what he has already suffered, and he to re-live it and suffer it anew.

> 'In the sad moonlight, she clasped him by the neck, and laid her face upon his breast. In the moonlight which is always sad, as the light of the sun itself is - as the light called human life is - at its coming and its going.' (Ibid.)

This point, the rising and setting of the sun being sad, is important, because the development of Sydney Carton's character - from a dissolute course to a sublime end - is continually touched with the sunrise.

Carton asks Stryver to turn him 'in some direction' before he leaves, for it is 'a gloomy thing...to talk about one's own past, with the day breaking'. This self-conscious incompatibility of individual life with the glory of the sun is conveyed in solemn tones:

'Sadly, sadly, the sun rose; it rose upon no sadder sight than the man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. V)

Finally as the great moment of trial draws near, with the immortal music of 'the resurrection and the life' in his soul, Carton sees his way:

'Then, the night, with the moon and the stars, turned pale and died, and for a little while it seemed as if Creation were delivered over to Death's dominion.

'But, the glorious sun, rising, seemed to strike those words, that burden of the night, straight and warm to his heart in its long bright rays. And looking along them, with reverently shaded eyes, a bridge of light appeared to span the air between him and the sun, while the river sparkled under it.' (TTC, Bk. III, Ch. IX)

Thus the light of the sun, sadly but nobly, points through the dark strait gate of Death to the bright free realms of Eternity.

The moonlight in the very last scene in Great Expectations has again a real suggestive function to perform. After eleven years Pip returns to Joe and Biddy, and he goes to have a look at Satis House which is in ruins:

'A cold silvery mist had veiled the afternoon, and the moon was not yet up to scatter it. But, the stars were shining beyond the mist, and the moon was coming, and the evening was not dark.' (GE, Ch. LIX)

Then he sees Estella there, and they meet:

'The moon began to rise, and I thought of the placid look of the white ceiling, which had passed away. The moon began to rise, and I thought of the pressure on my hand...' (Ibid.)

And the tears of reunion are saturated with light:

'The silvery mist was touched with the first rays of the moonlight, and the same rays touched the tears that dropped from her eyes.' (Ibid.)

As in the Tale, the moon here is symbolic of love, and its successful struggle against the mists signifies the ultimate triumph of the human heart over its own vanities.

The dark lantern glimmering over the dust-heaps in Our Mutual Friend strikes the same note of stealthy and detective activity as does Mr. Bucket's bull's eye in Bleak House, and as do the torches on the misty marshes in Great Expectations. But it seems to be devoid of any special significance. What is really important is 'the one light' which Bradley sees gleaming from the Lock-house window on the eve of his plunge to death with Riderhood in his fatal embrace. It arrests his steps, and its rays seem 'to fasten themselves to him and draw him on'.

This light, 'the joint product of a fire and a candle', appears to have a hypnotic power, and is perhaps a fore-runner of the red light in Drood. On Christmas Eve 'a boisterous gale' lashes Cloisterham:

> 'The red light burns steadily all the evening in the light-house on the margin of the tide of busy life...'
>
> 'Still, the red light burns steadily. Nothing is steady but the red light.' (MED, Ch. XIV)

It is positively suggestive of some dreadful deed, and later, from Mr. Datchery's almost detective point of view, Dickens connects it with Mr. Jasper's 'sombre' room which is 'mostly in shadow', untouched by the sun:

> 'John Jasper's lamp is kindled, and his Lighthouse is shining when Mr. Datchery returns alone towards it. As mariners on a dangerous voyage, approaching an iron-bound coast, may look along the beams of the warning light to the haven lying beyond it that may never be reached, so Mr. Datchery's wistful gaze is directed to this beacon, and beyond.' (MED, Ch. XXIII)

In Our Mutual Friend and Edwin Drood then Dickens returns to the earlier scene of crime and murder, but the light he throws on it now, is not natural but man-made. None the less light it is, and awes the guilty as well as proclaims the guilt.

Thus apart from the usual metaphorical senses, light conveys significant meaning and suggestive impression. In its heavenly sources, and in their earthly copies, it stands for innocence, peace, truth, love, affection, justice, freedom, and hope, and puts to shame and rout crime, guilt, falsehood, iniquity, torture, oppression, and persecution, in fact all that goes with shadows and darkness. In one word, light symbolizes the principle of good in man, in relation to himself and in relation to others. It helps and sustains life. It is life, 'the visible spirit of God', 'creation's mind'.

The whole problem of ethics, the conflict between good and evil, is therefore an interplay of light and darkness, and, as seen above, Dickens depicts it essentially in terms of the art of painting - in sharp contrast, in delicate mingling, and in all the intervening shades. Setting, scene, character, idea, all gain point and colour from such treatment, so that his work achieves a purposeful, pictorial quality, and besides the vast field of human behaviour, the entire contemporary prospect, with its social misery and domestic unhappiness, its industrial progress and political unrest, its acquisitive culture and mechanical knowledge, comes visibly alive under the touch of that master-painter in words.

B - 'UNIVERSAL'

1 - THE GREAT MANUFACTURER

'Old Time, that greatest and longest-established Spinner of all...'

- Hard Times

Dickens calls 'the long bright rays' of the sun, 'bars of the prison of this lower world',[1] for man's life here is primarily conditioned by solar radiance. The eternal and mysterious state of flux assumes the recurring dual pattern of night and day, and the human mind fashions it into the triple mould of Past, Present, and Future, which takes the more definite and serviceable form of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. Into this interminable warp is woven the ever-running cyclic weft of the seasons, so that the fabric produced by the Great Manufacturer, Old Time, at its great loom is measured by the yard-stick of 'year', its periodic movement giving mixed feelings to man.

It is in this mood that the theme of year is depicted in the Sketches. Dickens likes the New Year to be ushered in not lachrymosely but boisterously, not 'with watching and fasting', but 'with gaiety and glee'. Yet 'when the first stroke of twelve, peals from the neighbouring churches', he becomes conscious of 'something awful in the sound'. Because

> 'we measure man's life by years, and it is a solemn knell that warns us we have passed another of the landmarks which stand between us and the grave; disguise it as we may, the reflection will force itself on our minds, that when the next bell announces

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1. Little Dorrit, Bk. II, Ch. XXX.

> the arrival of a new year, we may be insensible alike of the timely warning we have so often neglected, and of all the warm feelings that glow within us now.' (SB, 'The New Year')

That strikes the key-note of Dickens's treatment of Time. Clocks and chimes and bell-ringing in general assume a significant role. The scene of Ralph Nickleby's suicide is an adequate illustration. The midnight sky is dark and threatening, and a black cloud that has seemed to follow him, appears to hover directly over the house. And when the sound of a deep bell comes along the wind, striking the hour, 'One', the usurer cries:

> "Lie on!...with your iron tongue; ring merrily for births that make expectants writhe, and marriages that are made in hell, and toll ruefully for the dead whose shoes are worn already. Call men to prayers who are godly because not found out, and ring chimes for the coming in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to its end. No bell or book for me; throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there to infect the air!" (NN, Ch. LXII)

Dickens introduces here the 'iron tongue' of time, because as a symbol of the joys and sorrows of life, it is best suited to bring out in relief an isolated villain's contempt of all that knits mankind together.

The clock becomes Master Humphrey's chief and first friend, the companion of his solitude. His long winter evenings are as much relieved by 'its cricket-voice' as by 'the shining fire' in the hearth. In fact it is the very soul of the chimney-corner, and the tales and yarns deposited in, and recovered from, its case give it a special meaning. The clock is symbolic of Time, because what is lived in Time, can only be re-lived by telling over in Time, overtly and in participation through expression, and covertly and in exclusiveness through memory. It figures somewhat similarly in The Cricket on the Hearth where it is an important member of the hearth-company: it

strikes as the kettle sings and the cricket chirps.

The title and the machinery for the 1844 Christmas book were no doubt suggested to Dickens by the maddening effect of the sudden clashing out of the bells of Genoa, but, as seen above, the chimes and the clock had already held a fair measure of significance for him. Toby Veck's imaginative interpretations of the chimes in the context of his day-to-day fluctuating fortunes are therefore not entirely new. As a vocal representative of Time, the bells are not only a harbinger of joy and sorrow - and hence a fit medium for conveying impressions of humour and pathos - but also a stern reprimand of duty. The Goblin of the Great Bell says to Trotty:

> "The voice of Time...cries to man, Advance! Time IS for his advancement and improvement; for his greater worth, his greater happiness, his better life; his progress onward to that goal within its knowledge and its view, and set there, in the period when Time and He began. Ages of darkness, wickedness, and violence, have come and gone: millions uncountable, have suffered, lived, and died: to point the way before him. Who seeks to turn him back, or stay him on his course, arrests a mighty engine which will strike the meddler dead; and be the fiercer and the wilder, ever, for its momentary check!"

And Trotty learns the lesson:

> "I see the Spirit of the Chimes among you!... I know that our inheritance is held in store for us by Time. I know there is a Sea of Time to rise one day, before which all who wrong us or oppress us will be swept away like leaves. I see it, on the flow! I know that we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves, nor doubt the Good in one another."

Thus when Time's exhortation is Advance, man's watchword should be Hope. Facts and figures, political economy and wicked Cant have no right to stay the flow of life.

Advance and hope imply change, and change involves waste. Time opens vistas before but spreads oblivion behind. The gigantic Coliseum at Rome, and the immense Campagna nearby are a vast and

sobering ruin:

> 'To see it crumbling there, an inch a year...to see its Pit of Fight filled up with earth, and the peaceful Cross planted in the centre; to climb into its upper halls, and look down on ruin, ruin, ruin, all about it...is to see the ghost of old Rome, wicked wonderful old city, haunting the very ground on which its people trod.'
>
> 'Broken aqueducts...broken temples; broken tombs. A desert of decay, sombre and desolate beyond all expression...' (PI, 'Rome')

Italy illustrates the march of Time:

> 'Italy...helps to inculcate the lesson that the wheel of Time is rolling for an end, and that the world is, in all great essentials, better, gentler, more forbearing, and more hopeful, as it rolls!'

The profound tone of the Chimes and the Pictures combines with the artistic need in Dombey, for the watch and the clock represent Time in a familiar and immediate form, while the impression continues as deep and fundamental as ever:

> 'Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes... On the brow of Dombey, Time and his brother Care had set some marks, as on a tree that was to come down in good time - remorseless twins they are for striding through their human forests, notching as they go - while the countenance of Son was crossed and recrossed with a thousand little creases, which the same deceitful Time would take delight in smoothing out and wearing away with the flat part of his scythe, as a preparation of the surface for his deeper operations.' (DS, Ch. I)

This broad shadowy note depicting father and son at the beginning gives place to a tense pathetic strain showing mother and daughter at the end of the chapter. Mrs. Dombey is in the throes of death, and Florence, in her innocent affection, hangs on to her while the physician, the medical attendants, Mr. Dombey and his sister look on. The dying lady is unconscious that she is being aroused, addressed, or called:

'There was no sound in answer but the loud ticking of Mr. Dombey's watch and Dr. Parker Peps's watch, which seemed in the silence to be running a race.'

.....

'No word or sound in answer. Mr. Dombey's watch and Dr. Parker Peps's watch seemed to be racing faster.'

.....

'The race in the ensuing pause was fierce and furious. The watches seemed to jostle, and to trip each other up.'

The racing watches not only heighten the tension of the moment, but signify that a soul's race in Time is coming to an end.

It is equally important that Paul's birth is so strongly couched in terms of Time. In fact it points forward to the very significant interest that he will evince in the clock at Dr. Blimber's:

'there was no sound through all the house but the ticking of a great clock in the hall, which made itself audible in the very garrets.' (DS, Ch. XI)

Mr. Dombey and Paul meet Dr. Blimber who greets them, saying "And how do you, Sir?...and how is my little friend?" -

'Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him up, and to go on saying, "how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?" over and over again.' (Ibid.)

This clearly recalls Trotty Veck's interpretation of the chimes. But, unlike Trotty, Paul always hears the clock repeating the same question:

'and then he heard the loud clock in the hall still gravely inquiring "how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?" as it had done before.' (Ibid.)

Paul is seen 'deferentially passing the great clock which was still as anxious as ever to know how he found himself':

'It was a wonder that the great clock in the hall, instead

of being constant to its first enquiry, never said, "Gentlemen, we will now resume our studies," for that phrase was often enough repeated in its neighbourhood.' (DS, Ch. XII)

The clock appeals specially to Paul's extraordinarily virile imagination:

'He loved to be alone; and in those short intervals when he was not occupied with his books, liked nothing so well as wandering about the house by himself, or sitting on the stairs, listening to the great clock in the hall.' (Ibid.)

And this interest grows continually:

'The grave old clock had more of personal interest in the tone of its formal inquiry; and the restless sea went rolling on all night, to the sounding of a melancholy strain - yet it was pleasant too - that rose and fell with the waves, and rocked him, as it were, to sleep.' (DS, Ch. XIV)

Not without reason does the image of the clock blend with that of the waves - time, through measured movement, leads man to eternity.

Paul falls ill, but soon recovers a little, and finds real excitement:

'Lo and behold, there was something the matter with the great clock; and a workman on a pair of steps had taken its face off, and was poking instruments into the works, by the light of a candle! This was a great event for Paul, who sat down on the bottom stair, and watched the operation attentively: now and then glancing at the clock-face, leaning all askew, against the wall hard by, and feeling a little confused by a suspicion that it was ogling him.' (Ibid.)

He gets into conversation with the workman:

'Paul asked him a multitude of questions about chimes and clocks: as, whether people watched up in the lonely church steeples by night to make them strike, and how the bells were rung when people died, and whether those were different bells from wedding bells, or only sounded dismal in the fancies of the living.' (Ibid.)

The disorder of the 'grave old clock' coincides with the indisposition of the 'old-fashioned boy', and it is particularly meaningful in the context of chimes, because, as suggested earlier, with their age-old associations of joy and sorrow they are symbolic

of Time which administers to men life as well as death.

This scene is very significant, for soon after Paul returns home and passes away.

The Wooden Midshipman with its chronometers supports the time atmosphere created by the watch and the clock, and the earlier sustained and blended metaphorical touches recur towards the close:

> 'The sea had ebbed and flowed, through a whole year. Through a whole year, the winds and clouds had come and gone; the ceaseless work of Time had been performed, in storm and sunshine. Through a whole year, the tides of human chance and change had set in their allotted courses.' (DS, Ch. LVIII)

Time is a ceaseless, irresistible power: the elements are its dutiful couriers, and men its helpless tools. Thus motion, perpetual motion is the law of life, the order of the universe. Advance and hope are the real human need, for he who stops or looks back, is no more. Mrs. Clennam is an apt illustration:

> 'The house in the city preserved its heavy dulness through all these transactions, and the invalid within it turned the same unvarying round of life. Morning, noon, and night, morning, noon, and night, each recurring with its accompanying monotony, always the same reluctant return of the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork.'

> 'To stop the clock of busy existence, at the hour when we were personally sequestered from it, to suppose mankind stricken motionless, when we were brought to a stand-still, to be unable to measure the changes beyond our view, by any larger standard than the shrunken one of our own uniform and contracted existence; is the infirmity of many invalids, and the mental unhealthiness of almost all recluses.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XXIX)

Mrs. Clennam has withdrawn from the race, and her view of life from the wheeled chair is false.

And Miss Havisham's is a far worse case. What was only metaphor in the above extract now becomes fact. Time has a stop here, and so has life. Pip surveys her room:

> 'It was when I stood before her, avoiding her eyes, that I took note of the surrounding objects in detail, and saw that her watch had stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and that a clock in the room had stopped at twenty minutes to nine.' (GE, Ch. VIII)

There is a fairy-tale motif here, and it operates through Pip. He paints brilliant pictures of Miss Havisham's plans for him:

> 'She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin - in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess.' (GE, Ch. XXIX)

But it is no use looking back to the age of romance, and Pip 'the young Knight' fails to marry Estella 'the Princess' as such. Time throws him back on reality - the village forge and the approach to a broken woman as a broken man, on a heap of rubble with the moonlight struggling against the mists.

To lag behind time is to lie low, to lack the verve of life. Again, the quality of a place is known by the quality of its clock, and a neglected cause has a mouth-piece, which is slow and weak, unable to keep abreast of the moving tide of Time:

> 'London Time by the great clock of Saint Paul's, ten at night. All the lesser London churches strain their metallic throats. Some, flippantly begin before the heavy bell of the great cathedral; some, tardily begin three, four, half a dozen, strokes behind it; all are insufficiently near accord, to leave a resonance in the air, as if the winged father who devours his children, had made a sounding sweep with his gigantic scythe in flying over the city.
>
> 'What is this clock lower than most of the rest, and nearer to the ear, that lags so far behind to-night as to strike into the vibration alone? This is the clock of the Hospital for Foundling Children.' (No Thoroughfare)

And Time acts as a mower in Edwin Drood. Christmas Eve in Cloisterham is depicted in ominous terms: the significance of 'the

striking of the Cathedral clock, and the cawing of the rooks from the Cathedral tower' is clear enough.

Neville does not like going to Mr. Jasper's dinner. Twice he passes the Gate House, reluctant to enter:

> 'At length, the Cathedral clock chiming one quarter, with a rapid turn he hurries in.
>
> 'And so he goes up the postern stair.' (MED, Ch. XIV)

Not long before the dinner-hour 'the Princess Puffer' tells Edwin that 'Ned' is a 'threatened' name 'just now'. Her words seem to be told over all around:

> 'There is some solemn echo of them even in the Cathedral chime, which strikes a sudden surprise to his heart as he turns in under the archway of the Gate House.
>
> 'And so he goes up the postern stair.' (Ibid.)

One feature of the havoc caused by the storm is specially suggestive of a dire interception of a race of life: 'It is then seen that the hands of the Cathedral clock are torn off...' Time, the great mower, ever wields his gigantic scythe surely and invisibly, but once at least its sweep is recorded on the face of his own symbol, the clock.

Thus the watch and the clock represent man's allotted share of activity, the round of a day on the dial being like the round of a life in Time. In relation to itself the human mind visualizes Time in a cyclic pattern, and in relation to the universe as a triple vista of Past, Present, and Future. Man is lost in Time, but ultimately Time will itself be lost in Eternity:

> 'Time, so soon to lose itself in vast Eternity, rolled on like a mighty river, swoln and rapid as it nears the sea.' (BR, Ch. LXXVI)

And man's prize is Immortality; he will live when Time shall cease. The young seamstress asks Sydney Carton if it will seem long in Heaven to wait for her cousin, and he says:

> "It cannot be, my child; there is no Time there, and no trouble there." (TTC, Bk. III, Ch. XV)

Hence man should advance with hope in his destiny, for thus alone can he meet the challenge of Time, who is a spinner as well as a mower, a maker as well as a breaker.

2 - THE DARK ROAD

'Then, looking at the dark road and its uncertain objects, he would have gradually trailed off again into thinking, "Where are we driving, he and I, I wonder, on the darker road of life?..."'

- Little Dorrit

The idea of life as a journey, a short race in Time, beginning from, and ending in, Eternity, is of immemorial origin, and the poet and the priest in all lands have invested it with a sober and melancholy colour. This is due to the simple fact that sooner or later all journeys come to an end, and that an end is suggestive of death. How Dickens partakes of this tradition will be shown presently, but how he enriches it with an impress of his own times will be discussed later.

The theme appears metaphorically in the coachman's jargon

typified by Mr. Tony Weller. The reverend Stiggins, under the influence of drink and in the presence of Mrs. Weller and Sam, calls Mr. Weller a benighted man, and he hits back:

> "If I don't get no better light than that 'ere moonshine o' your'n, my vorthy creetur...it's wery likely as I shall continey to be a night coach till I'm took off the road altogether." (PP, Ch. XLIV)

This is only an indirect suggestion, but Nickleby puts the matter straight enough. The similarity between life and journey is first casually stated when Nicholas and Smike leave London for Portsmouth in search of a living:

> 'It was a harder day's journey...for there were long and weary hills to climb; and in journeys, as in life, it is a great deal easier to go down hill than up.' (NN, Ch. XXII)

Later, however, the idea appears in a reflective strain. After a sleepless night Nicholas prepares to save Madeline from the clutches of Arthur Gride:

> 'As the traveller sees farthest by day, and becomes aware of rugged mountains and trackless plains which the friendly darkness had shrouded from his sight and mind together, so the wayfarer in the toilsome path of human life sees with each returning sun some new obstacle to surmount, some new height to be attained; distances stretch out before him which last night were scarcely taken into account, and the light which gilds all nature with its cheerful beams, seems but to shine upon the weary obstacles which yet lie strewn between him and the grave.' (NN, Ch. LIII)

The continuous course of human activity, punctuated by the nightly break is visualized through an extended and elaborate simile.

The idea of life as a pilgrimage is only a variation on the idea of life as a journey, a pilgrim bringing in a greater measure of devotion than a wayfarer. Little Nell thinks in terms of The Pilgrim's Progress:

> "Dear grandfather,...I feel as if we were both Christian, and laid down on this grass all the cares and troubles we brought with us; never to take them up again." (OCS, Ch. XV)

They are like Christian in that they have left the 'City of Destruction' and facing many an odd and undergoing many a trial, they arrive at last in the ancient church, and, through it, the 'Celestial City'.

Travelling to London with his daughters, Mr. Pecksniff delivers a homily in terms of a journey:

> "What are we...but coaches? Some of us are slow coaches... some of us are fast coaches. Our passions are the horses; and rampant animals too!...and Virtue is the drag. We start from The Mother's Arms, and we run to The Dust Shovel." (MC, Ch. VIII)

This sustained metaphor brings out the dominant trait of Pecksniff's character, i.e., his hypocrisy. Subscribing to this is his sham respectability exposed through vehicular associations: "that rumbling, tumbling, jolting, shaking, scraping, creaking, villanous old gig". A gig with its 'clammy cushions' gives a man 'numbed' fingers, 'granite legs', and 'marble' toes. In fact it can only develop 'stagnant misery', and that is what false gentility lives in. It is clear that the gig figures in Chuzzlewit with a certain measure of significance, and not merely as a means of conveyance as it appears on Marlborough Downs in 'The Bagman's Story' in Pickwick.

A similar symbolic touch recurs later in Bleak House when Mr. Vholes is represented as owning a gig drawn by 'a gaunt pale horse'.[1]

Dickens also employs journey imagery to portray emotional falsification. Lady Dedlock confesses to her daughter:

> "I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where I will. From day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, I do not see the way before my guilty feet." (BH, Ch. XXXVI)

The description of Jo's physical pain and death gains power from the same source:

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1. See Appendix E, p. 443.

'Allan Woodcourt lays his hand upon his pulse, and on his chest, "Draw breath, Jo!" "It draws," says Jo, "as heavy as a cart." He might add, "and rattles like it"; but he only mutters, "I'm a-moving on, sir."'

.....

'For the cart so hard to draw, is near its journey's end, and drags over stony ground. All round the clock it labours up the broken steps, shattered and worn. Not many times can the sun rise, and behold it still upon its weary road.'

.....

'The cart had very nearly given up, but labours on a little more.'

'The cart is shaken all to pieces, and the rugged road is very near its end.'

'The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!' (BH, Ch. XLVII)

Originating in a metaphor for Jo's labouring breath, the cart seems to represent his whole life of want and ignorance, and points forward to Doctor Marigold where it becomes a challenging, mocking symbol of poverty and suffering.

At the Dorrit stage the idea of life as a journey or pilgrimage appears to have impressed Dickens with its full universal significance, for he actually planned to integrate the vast human spectacle in its terms by making the characters meet and part like travellers. Indirectly, that would regulate the entire course of action in the book, and the original title, 'Nobody's Fault',[1] establishes this consideration only more firmly. Relevant evidence in this regard can be traced in the first chapters and even further.

Miss Wade introduces the idea when the company in quarantine at Marseilles begins to disperse:

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1. Dickens dropped the intention after the first number. See Butt and Tillotson, p. 224.

"In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads...and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done." (LD, Bk. I, Ch. II)

Pet starts at the 'necessary evil' implications of the remark, but Miss Wade amplifies it emphatically:

"Yet...you may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with you, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know, or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town." (Ibid.)

The chapter concludes on the same note:

'The day passed on; and again the wide stare stared itself out; and the hot night was on Marseilles; and through it the caravan of the morning, all dispersed, went their appointed ways. And thus ever, by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and to react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life.' (Ibid.)

Mrs. Clennam is another illustration of the same idea:

'Strange, if the little sick-room light were in effect a watch-light, burning in that place every night until an appointed event should be watched out! Which of the vast multitude of travellers, under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and re-act on one another, which of the host may, with no suspicion of the journey's end, be travelling surely hither?

'Time shall show us. The post of honour and the post of shame, the general's station and the drummer's, a peer's statue in Westminster Abbey and a seaman's hammock in the bosom of the deep, the mitre and the workhouse, the woolsack and the gallows, the throne and the guillotine - the travellers to all are on the great high road; but it has wonderful divergences, and only Time shall show us whither each traveller is bound.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XV)

Through this recurring touch Dickens seems to count on an impression of mystery and predestination which, besides whetting the reader's interest, suggests that man is only an instrument in the hands

of Fate.

The carriage, which takes the newly wedded Sparklers to Florence, acquires a significant meaning:

> 'So the Bride had mounted into her handsome chariot, incidentally accompanied by the Bridegroom; and after rolling smoothly over a fair pavement, had begun to jolt through a Slough of Despond, and through a long, long avenue of wrack and ruin. Other nuptial carriages are said to have gone the same road, before and since.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XV)

This near cynicism in the context of matrimony and acquired gentility may have developed from personal experience, and the carriage here is not different from that in Bleak House in which Lady Dedlock - sometimes with Sir Leicester 'incidentally' - flitted about, at home and abroad.

In A Tale of Two Cities again the carriage appears as a symbol of family and station. Monsieur the Marquis drives through the Paris streets:

> 'With a wild rattle and clatter, and an inhuman abandonment of consideration not easy to be understood in these days, the carriage dashed through streets and swept round corners, with women screaming before it, and men clutching each other and clutching children out of its way. At last swooping at a street corner by a fountain, one of its wheels came to asickening little jolt, and there was a loud cry from a number of voices, and the horses reared and plunged.' (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. VII)

Gaspard's child is killed. A crowd gathers round the carriage, and Defarge arrives on the scene to review the incident as 'a philosopher'. The Marquis throws him a gold coin as hush money, but it is flung back into the carriage. To this the Marquis reacts as a real representative of the nobility:

> "You dogs!...I would ride over any of you willingly, and exterminate you from the earth. If I knew which rascal threw at the carriage, and if the brigand were sufficiently near it, he should be crushed under the wheels." (Ibid.)

Then he leans back in his seat again, and gives the word "Go on!" -

> 'He was driven on, and other carriages came whirling by in quick succession; the Minister, the State-Projector, the Farmer-General, the Doctor, the Lawyer, the Ecclesiastic, the Grand Opera, the Comedy, the whole Fancy Ball in a bright continuous flow, came whirling by.' (Ibid.)

In this sparkling setting the carriage becomes a symbol of aristocratic disdain and feudal oppression.

It is interesting that against the glittering pageantry of the carriage is balanced the grim spectacle of the tumbril:

> 'Along the Paris streets, the death-carts rumble, hollow and harsh. Six tumbrils carry the day's wine to La Guillotine.'

> 'Six tumbrils roll along the streets. Change these back again to what they were, thou powerful enchanter, Time, and they shall be seen to be the carriages of absolute monarchs, the equipages of feudal nobles, the toilettes of flaring Jezebels... No; the great magician who majestically works out the appointed order of the Creator, never reverses his transformations... Changeless and hopeless, the tumbrils roll along.' (TTC, Bk. III, Ch. XV)

Thus Commonalty's tumbril is Time's irreversible answer to Aristocracy's carriage.

The cart in Doctor Marigold not only represents the sad plight of the Cheap Jack trade, but serves as a unique coign of vantage. Standing on its footboard in the market-place, the Cheap Jack measures himself against 'other public speakers, - Members of Parliament, Platforms, Pulpits, Counsel learned in the law', and asks why he should be forced to take out a hawker's licence, when no such thing is expected of the political hawkers. And he further establishes the similarity between 'Cheap Jacks' and 'Dear Jacks'. Death takes away his daughter and wife, even his dog, and he has to appear at selling times although he suffers in private, lonely feelings rolling upon him:

> "That's often the way with us public characters. See us on

> the footboard, and you'd give pretty well anything you possess to be us. See us off the footboard, and you'd add a trifle to be off your bargain."

Through this comparison Dickens no doubt brings a satirical motive to bear upon a realistic situation, but the footboard does tend to become a typical post of Necessity where the pain within and the ridicule without meet in bitter confidence. Essentially associated with a hard labouring life, 'a Cart' encourages domestic unhappiness far more than 'a Palace':

> "Thirteen year of temper in a Palace would try the worst of you, but thirteen year of temper in a Cart would try the best of you. You are kept so very close to it in a cart, you see... Whether the jolting makes it worse, I don't undertake to decide; but in a cart it does come home to you, and stick to you. Wiolence in a cart is so wiolent, and aggravation in a cart is so aggravating."

To the misfortune of his wife's temper is added the calamity of his little Sophy's death:

> "I used to wonder, as I plodded along at the old horse's head, whether there was many carts upon the road that held so much dreariness as mine, for all my being looked up to as the King of the Cheap Jacks."

Thus in spite of the fact that the story concerns a particular calling, the journey imagery continues to refer the reader's sensibility to its deeper, universal connotations, and makes it the rare blend of humour and pathos that it is.

In Drood, Chapter XXIII, the two opium smokers talk mysteriously about the commission of a fatal crime in terms of 'journey', 'road', and 'fellow-traveller'. But actually this significant, solemn note is introduced much earlier. The death of Edwin's father is reviewed metaphorically: 'he, too, went the silent road into which all earthly pilgrimages merge, some sooner, and some later'.

It may be clear from the above that apart from an artistic consideration in Dorrit - and that did suffer a decline when the original title of 'Nobody's Fault' was dropped - and an air of significance about the gig and the carriage in Chuzzlewit, Bleak House, and the Tale the idea of life as a journey or pilgrimage makes only a conventional appearance and mostly metaphorically. But the matter does not rest here, for Dickens, under the impact of his own age, transforms the traditional images, and almost always imparts a new immediacy of appeal to his work. That is how the minor symbols discussed above connect the universal with the topical in a most natural way. This, however, involves the impress of Dickens's own times, hinted at earlier and to be taken up separately.

C - 'TOPICAL'

1 - THE TRIUMPHANT MONSTER

'The power that forced itself upon its iron way...was a type of the triumphant monster, Death.' - Dombey and Son

The coach, the gig, the cart, the carriage, and the tumbril, all refer to the road, and move within the same circle of comparison, namely, the one between human life and a journey. And so does the railway train - yet very differently in Dickens. Because from these commonplace rudiments it comes to epitomize the whole host of pernicious influences which the vogue of machinery and the advent of steam have unleashed upon mankind, and as such it is entitled to an important, and in some ways unique, place in the symbol-gallery of Dickens.

The Surrey Iron Railway was England's, and for that matter the world's, first public railway, and was opened from Wandsworth to Croydon in 1803. Very soon experiments with steam traction on wagonways became necessary, because the cost of horse fodder was rising as a result of the Napoleonic wars. Richard Trevithick's demonstration of steam railway traction in 1804 was the first of its kind, but about the time Charles Dickens was born, the continuous application of steam traction had become a practical reality, and by the time he reached his teens, in 1825 to be precise, steam locomotives were employed on the Stockton and Darlington Railway for the first public passenger-carrying in the world. Very soon railways developed

into a means of general transport, the total mileage open being 97½ in 1830 and 1497½ by 1840. The inventive genius of men like George Stephenson had created an opportunity, and the writings of men like William James, 'the father of the railways', and Thomas Gray had made the people avail themselves of it.

A significant contrast between the coach and the railway train appears every now and then in Dickens's work, and seems to betray a conflict. Speed held a tremendous appeal for his active and restless nature, and he fully enjoyed the power it gave to man - after all he had exploited it himself as a newspaper correspondent. It stimulated his imagination:

> 'I can't make out. I am never sure of time or place upon a Railroad. I can't read, I can't think, I can't sleep - I can only dream. Rattling along in this railway carriage in a state of luxurious confusion, I take it for granted I am coming from somewhere, and going somewhere else. I seek to know no more...' (Household Words, 'Railway Dreaming', May 10, 1856)

In this Dickens was a child of the age, taking pride in the vast avenues of progress it was opening for men. But in spite of the great gusto with which he experienced and described hurried movement, he was always conscious of its underlying destructive meaning. And steam, the volatile offspring of fire and water, combining in itself dutifully the devouring and spoiling qualities of its parents, emphasized that meaning only more dreadfully. Hence it was that Dickens became nostalgic about 'the old coaching days', and time and again put the coach beside the railway train.

Steam is a 'copious' subject on which all can converse:

> '"Wonderful thing steam, Sir." "Ah!...it is indeed, Sir." "Great power, Sir." "Immense - immense!" "Great deal done by steam, Sir." "Ah!...you may say that, Sir." "Still in its infancy, Sir." (SB, 'The River')

As one among the many, Dickens subscribes to the homage paid to steam, but as one apart from others he subtly points out his preferences. His 'Familiar Epistle from a Parent to a Child'[1] which he wrote in 1839 when giving up the editorship of Bentley's Miscellany, is mostly allegorical, and contains some very significant touches. The Miscellany is a 'brisk and rapid locomotive', its proprietor Bentley is an 'engineer and supervisor', its friends and patrons are passengers, the incoming editor Ainsworth is a Post-office Guard, and the out-going editor - and that is Dickens himself - is an 'old coachman'! And very meaningfully he visualizes the times 'when stations shall have superseded stables, and corn shall have given place to coke... In those dawning times...exhibition rooms shall teem with portraits of Her Majesty's favourite engine, with boilers after Nature by future Landseers...' The ultimate triumph of train over coach is potently prophesied, but not without a sense of loss.

Dickens is an old coachman in fancy, and Mr. Weller senior is one in fact, so that some agreement between them is natural. And according to Mr. Weller 'the rail is unconstitootional and an inwaser o' privileges', and devoid of 'the honour and dignity of travelling' which cannot be 'vithout a coachman', and it even lacks real comfort:

> "As to the comfort, vere's the comfort o' sittin' in a harm-cheer lookin' at brick walls or heaps o' mud, never comin' to a public-house, never seein' a glass o' ale, never goin' through a pike, never meetin' a change o' no kind (horses or othervise), but alvays comin' to a place, ven you come to one at all, the wery picture o' the last, vith the same p'leesemen standing about, the same blessed old bell a ringin', the same unfort'nate people standing behind the bars, a waitin' to be let in; and everythin' the same except the name, vich is wrote up in the same sized letters as the last name and vith the same colours." (MHC)

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1. Bentley's Miscellany, Vol. V, (1839), pp. 219-220.

Dickens goes deep into the matter when he says that monotony kills the very spirit of comfort. The view must change in order to bring relief to the senses, for the machine-like uniformity of the railway surroundings tires the mind in a sinister way.

Another hateful aspect of the railway movement is revealed in the general spoliation which accompanies the laying of tracks and the erection of its establishments. The beautiful landscape is ripped up, and the dear old haunts are ravaged. The face of nature is mutilated, and the heart of man blunted. Staggs's Gardens presents an accurate seismogram of the physical impact of the railway upheaval:

> 'The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcases of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.
>
> 'In short, the yet unfinished and unopened railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.' (DS, Ch. VI)

And then in good time perfect order prevails, but Staggs's Gardens

is nowhere to be traced. It is a case of complete metamorphosis:

> 'There was no such place as Staggs's Gardens. It had vanished from the earth. Where the old rotten summer-houses once had stood, palaces now reared their heads, and granite columns of gigantic girth opened a vista to the railway world beyond. The miserable waste ground, where the refuse-matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frowsy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise. The old by-streets now swarmed with passengers and vehicles of every kind; the new streets that had stopped disheartened in the mud and waggon-ruts, formed towns within themselves, originating wholesome comforts and conveniences belonging to themselves, and never tried nor thought of until they sprang into existence. Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks. The carcasses of houses, and beginnings of new thoroughfares, had started off upon the line at steam's own speed, and shot away into the country in a monster train.' (DS, Ch. XV)

The prophecy in the 'Familiar Epistle' - referred to earlier - comes true. The railway fever is catching:

> 'There were railway patterns in its drapers' shops, and railway journals in the windows of its newsmen. There were railway hotels, coffee-houses, lodging-houses, boarding-houses; railway plans, maps, views, wrappers, bottles, sandwich boxes, and time-tables; railway hackney-coach and cabstands; railway omnibuses, railway streets and buildings, railway hangers-on and parasites, and flatterers out of all calculation. There was even railway time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in.' (Ibid.)

Men and machines were equally mad with the excitement of action:

> 'To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood. Crowds of people and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours, produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action. The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips... Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved.' (Ibid.)

It appears that Dickens has totally succumbed to the might of the railway magic. But it is not so, for the 'old coachman' in him is

too hard to die. The dangers that the new power poses are as immense as the potentialities that it holds:

> 'But Staggs's Gardens had been cut up root and branch. Oh woe the day, when "not a rood of English ground" - laid out in Staggs's Gardens - is secure!' (Ibid.)

Staggs's Gardens then stands for the old which the railway, the symbol of the new, is ringing out. What has happened to it will happen to every rood of English ground. The change is imposing but painful. And this illustrates Dickens's mixed attitude to the railway, his fascination with it as an instrument of 'civilization and improvement', and his dread of it as an agent of dullness and aggression.

Furthermore, this distrust of the advance of mechanical science is not temporary; it is fundamental. It appears eighteen years later in the context of schools in Our Mutual Friend:

> 'The schools...were down in that district of the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market-gardens that will soon die under them. The schools were newly built, and there were so many like them all over the country, that one might have thought the whole were but one restless edifice with the locomotive gift of Aladdin's palace.' (OMF, Bk. II, Ch. I)

The disappearance of the old familiar scenes and the sameness of the new structures define the essential character of the great industrial change, and also reveal Dickens's typically Wordsworthian reaction to it in so far as it affects nature and the human emotions. And this reaction has been visible all along - especially in the Curiosity Shop, in Dombey, and in Hard Times. The dull uniformity of Coketown is particularly relevant here:

> 'It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in

> and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.'
>
> 'All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction.' (HT, Bk. I, Ch. V)

Dickens seems to sum up his sense of the new situation in Our Mutual Friend, Chapter I of Book II, when, reviewing the field of education, he observes that 'school-buildings, school-teachers, and school-pupils' are ' all according to pattern and all engendered in the light of the latest Gospel according to Monotony'.

The 'latest Gospel according to Monotony' recalls Mr. Weller's attack on 'the rail'. Thus whether it be Master Humphrey's Clock, Dombey, Hard Times, or Our Mutual Friend, the 'old coachman' in Dickens is very conscious of the sameness following in the wake of mechanical newness. The whole industrial activity is ravishing the beauty of the landscape and disfiguring the haunts of reminiscence. But what it is bringing and establishing instead is only patterns of monotony which offend the senses, and have a baneful influence on the spirit.

This great movement which set its uniform, dull stamp on stations, streets, and schools alike, got its momentum primarily from steam, and the tremendous speed and power of this sweeping change might be fully seen in the railway train, for it formed the spearhead of the massive attack for which the gathering forces of the industrial revolution had been preparing over the latter half of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries. It marked the culmination of the process which had started with the flying shuttle, and continued

with the spinning jenny, the roller spinning frame, the mule, and the steam engine.

All this was indeed a grand endeavour, but Dickens was not wholly won over by its grandeur. Viewing the prospect with Wordsworth's eyes where it was man against nature, and with Carlyle's where it was man against man, but, above all, always in the light of his own wholesome soul, he recognized in the railway train the disruptive, soul-sickening traits of the general contemporary activity, and the fact that the entire industrial effort was being increasingly directed and controlled by acquisitive motives, only made him see this symbol of progress in the evil semblance of death.

Whatever the significance with which he invests the railway train, Dickens surely enjoys speed, so much so that he even appears to try to re-live the experience. At least that is the impression which some passages depicting rapid motion give. American Notes[1] seems to set the descriptive pattern in regard to journeying by rail. Dickens is travelling to Lowell:

> 'On it whirls headlong, dives through the woods again, emerges in the light, clatters over frail arches, rumbles upon the heavy ground, shoots beneath a wooden bridge which intercepts the light for a second like a wink, suddenly awakens all the slumbering echoes in the main street of a large town, and dashes on haphazard, pell-mell, neck-or-nothing, down the middle of the road. There - with mechanics working at their trades, and people leaning from their doors and windows, and boys flying kites and playing marbles, and men smoking, and women talking, and children crawling, and pigs burrowing, and unaccustomed horses plunging and rearing, close to the very rails - there - on, on, on - tears the mad dragon of anengine with its train of cars; scattering in all directions a shower of burning sparks from its wood fire;

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1. Humphry House's following remark needs some slight qualification in this respect: 'The first railway journey fully described in Dickens is that of Dombey and the Major on their way to Leamington.' - The Dickens World, (1942) Ch. VI, p. 139.

screeching, hissing, yelling, panting; until at last the thirsty monster stops beneath a covered way to drink, the people cluster round, and you have time to breathe again.' (AN, Ch. IV)

The journey from Harrisburg onwards involves 'ten inclined planes; five ascending, and five descending':

'It was very pretty travelling thus, at a rapid pace along the heights of the mountain in a keen wind, to look down into a valley full of light and softness; catching glimpses, through the tree-tops, of scatteredcabins; children running to the doors; dogs bursting out to bark, whom we could see without hearing; terrified pigs scampering homewards; families sitting out in their rude gardens; cows gazing upward with a stupid indifference; men in their shirt-sleeves looking on at their unfinished houses, planning out to-morrow's work; and we riding onward, high above them, like a whirlwind.' (AN, Ch. X)

Tom Pinch - like Dickens himself - cannot 'resist the captivating sense of rapid motion through the pleasant air'. He is travelling by a coach which is 'none of your steady-going, yokel coaches, but a swaggering, rakish, dissipated, London coach; up all night, and lying by all day, and leading a devil of a life' -

'It rattled noisily through the best streets, defied the Cathedral, took the worst corners sharpest, went cutting in everywhere, making everything get out of its way; and spun along the open country-road, blowing a lively defiance out of its key-bugle, as its last glad parting legacy.'

'The four grays skimmed along, as if they liked it quite as well as Tom did; the bugle was in as high spirits as the grays; the coachman chimed in sometimes with his voice; the wheels hummed cheerfully in unison; the brass-work on the harness was an orchestra of little bells; and thus, as they went clinking, jingling, rattling, smoothly on, the whole concern, from the buckles of the leaders' coupling-reins, to the handle of the hind boot, was one great instrument of music.

'Yoho, past hedges, gates, and trees; past cottages and barns, and people going home from work. Yoho, past donkey-chaises, drawn aside into the ditch, and empty carts with rampant horses, whipped up at a bound upon the little water-course, and held by struggling carters close to the five-barred gate, until the coach had passed the narrow turning in the road. Yoho, by churches dropped down by themselves in quiet nooks, with rustic burial-grounds about them, where the graves are green, and daisies sleep - for it is evening - on the bosoms of the dead. Yoho,

> past streams, in which the cattle cool their feet, and where the rushes grow; past paddock-fences, farms, and rick-yards; past last year's stacks, cut, slice by slice, away, and showing, in the waning light, like ruined gables, old and brown. Yoho, down the pebbly dip, and through the merry water-splash, and up at a canter to the level road again. Yoho! Yoho!' (MC, Ch. XXXVI)

While these extracts from the Notes and Chuzzlewit show Dickens's full participation in the experience of speed, they also prove that he has discovered the secret of creating panoramic and cinematographic effects through description. The way for the rail journey to Leamington in Dombey is thus clear. There are even faint symbolic hints for the future.

Mrs. Gamp criticizes steam locomotion from her professional point of view. She curses the Antwerp boat, because it is a "spluttering noisy monster" unfit to carry "a delicate young creetur". "Them Confusion steamers", "especially them screeching railroad ones" have done greater harm to her "reg'lar work" than "all the other frights that ever was took". She has heard of "a young man, a guard upon a railway, only three year opened", who has been "a godfather...to six-and-twenty blessed little strangers, equally unexpected, and all on 'um named after the Ingeins as was the cause". And the packet on the wharf again gets its due from her:

> "Ugh!...one might even know you was a man's invention, from your disregardlessness of the weakness of our naturs, so one might, you brute!" (MC, Ch. XL)

The change from the subject of maternity in England to that of humanity in America means passing from humour to satire. The brutish and monstrous aspect of the steam power - discussed in a light vein above - gains the force of reality and carries greater conviction:

> 'How the wheels clank and rattle, and the tram-road shakes,

> as the train rushes on! And now the engine yells, as it were lashed and tortured like a living labourer, and writhed in agony. A poor fancy; for steel and iron are of infinitely greater account, in this commonwealth, than flesh and blood. If the cunning work of man be urged beyond its power of endurance, it has within it the elements of its own revenge; whereas the wretched mechanism of the Divine Hand is dangerous with no such property, but may be tampered with, and crushed, and broken, at the driver's pleasure. Look at that engine! It shall cost a man more dollars in the way of penalty and fine, and satisfaction of the outraged law, to deface in wantonness that senseless mass of metal, than to take the lives of twenty human creatures! Thus the stars wink upon the bloody stripes; and Liberty pulls down her cap upon her eyes, and owns Oppression in its vilest aspect, for her sister.' (MC, Ch. XXI)

The idealistic profession of 'Liberty and Moral Sensibility', as emblematized by stars and stripes is judged against the actual practice of Slavery and Oppression. Obviously the steam engine here represents manacled power, like that of a slave, but it also stands for the whole industrial enterprise of America. Steel and iron are more precious than flesh and blood, and it is money that determines morality.

If the monstrous aspect of the steam engine, as marked in the Notes, and later humorously pointed out by Mrs. Gamp, be combined with the representative character given to it in the sphere of material aggrandizement above, its full symbolic significance in Dombey is already visible in outline. The descriptive excellence and the suggestive richness of the passages recounting Mr. Dombey's journey are therefore in a natural order of things. Under the shadow of Paul's death, and accompanied by Major Bagstock, he travels to Leamington:

> 'He found no pleasure or relief in the journey. Tortured by these thoughts he carried monotony with him, through the rushing landscape, and hurried headlong, not through a rich and varied country, but a wilderness of blighted plans and gnawing jealousies. The very speed at which the train was whirled along mocked the swift course of the young life that had been borne away so steadily and so inexorably to its fore-doomed end. The power

that forced itself upon its iron way - its own - defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster, Death.

'Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, from the town, burrowing among the dwellings of men and making the streets hum, flashing out into the meadows for a moment, mining in through the damp earth, booming on in darkness and heavy air, bursting out again into the sunny day so bright and wide; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly with him: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!

'Through the hollow, on the height, by the heath, by the orchard, by the park, by the garden, over the canal, across the river, where the sheep are feeding, where the mill is going, where the barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the factory is smoking, where the stream is running, where the village clusters, where the great cathedral rises, where the bleak moor lies, and the wild breeze smooths or ruffles it at its inconstant will; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, and no trace to leave behind but dust and vapour: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!

'Breasting the wind and light, the shower and sunshine, away, and still away, it rolls and roars, fierce and rapid, smooth and certain, and great works and massive bridges crossing up above, fall like a beam of shadow an inch broad, upon the eye, and then are lost. Away, and still away, onward and onward ever: glimpses of cottage-homes, of houses, mansions, rich estates, of husbandry and handicraft, of people, of old roads and paths that look deserted, small, and insignificant as they are left behind: and so they do, and what else is there but such glimpses, in the track of the indomitable monster, Death!

'Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, plunging down into the earth again, and working on in such a storm of energy and perseverance, that amidst the darkness and whirlwind the motion seems reversed, and to tend furiously backward, until a ray of light upon the wet wall shows its surface flying past like a fierce stream. Away once more into the day, and through the day, with a shrill yell of exultation, roaring, rattling, tearing on, spurning everything with its dark breath, sometimes pausing for a minute where a crowd of faces are, that in a minute more are not: sometimes lapping water greedily, and before the spout at which it drinks has ceased to drip upon the ground, shrieking, roaring, rattling through the purple distance!

'Louder and louder yet, it shrieks and cries as it comes

> tearing on resistless to the goal: and now its way, still like the way of Death, is strewn with ashes thickly. Everything around is blackened. There are dark pools of water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations far below. There are jagged walls and falling houses close at hand, and through the battered roofs and broken windows, wretched rooms are seen, where want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, while smoke and crowded gables, and distorted chimneys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance.' (DS, Ch. XX)

A number of strands continuously run through this symbolic pattern. First, there is the wealth of objective detail captured in a constantly fleeting panoramic view. It sets down the physical features of 'rapid motion', and obviously points back to the Notes and Chuzzlewit. Secondly, there is the persistent, suggestive touch in terms of 'monster' and 'Death' coming as a climax to the whole breathless movement. Thirdly, there is the repeated reference of the cumulative effect to the state of Mr. Dombey's mind. The course of Paul's life, so swiftly run, is echoed throughout, but it bears upon personal pride and class-consciousness rather than paternal affection. The death of the boy is not the death of a son; it is the death of a master-passion, a dream of perpetuation of the House of Dombey through a male issue. It is important to note how Dickens attunes Mr. Dombey's mind to this mood. In fact the immediate cause is Mr. Toodle, the husband of Paul's foster-mother, 'Richards'. He forces himself on Mr. Dombey's notice saying, "I shall have the honour of stokin' of you down, Sir," and engages him in an unwelcome chat. Mr. Dombey is further scandalized to see upon his rough cap a piece of new crape he is wearing for his son, and he recalls how this man's wife had wept over the boy's pillow, and called him her own child:

> 'To think of this presumptuous raker among coals and ashes going on before there, with his sign of mourning! To think that

> this lost child...should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes, and their boasts of claiming community of feeling with himself, so far removed.' (Ibid.)

This is what sets Mr. Dombey's train of thought in motion, and keeps it abreast of the railway train. It is interesting that the description of the journey, as quoted above, ends on a social note. But Mr. Dombey's haughty grief - based as it is on money, on 'steel and iron' as against 'flesh and blood' - is wholly unmindful of the real genesis of the poverty and misery around:

> 'As Mr. Dombey looks out of his carriage window, it is never in his thoughts that the monster who has brought him there has let the light of day in on these things: not made or caused them. It was the journey's fitting end, and might have been, the end of everything; it was so ruinous and dreary.' (Ibid.)

The impression seems to be that Mr. Dombey half-consciously ascribes the sights of social wretchedness to the same monstrous power with which he is identifying his own calamity and defeat.

Dickens here appears to refute the false notion that the railways were responsible for the sad plight of the lower classes. It was true that they had despoiled the landscape of its natural beauty and associative charm, and substituted monotony for them, that behind their great vogue was the craze for material profit, but it was equally true that they had exposed to common view the hidden and far-flung haunts of dire poverty and black misery. In this regard they were indeed a mighty instrument of progress and reform.

The image of the steam engine as 'a type of the triumphant monster, Death', recurs later and full significantly. Here it is evoked from Paul's death, a happening of the recent past, there it suggests Carker's, an event of the near future. And it is interesting

that Dickens first connects Mr. Dombey's thoughts of death with the train, and then makes the connexion a fact before his very eyes.

'Spurned like any reptile' by the proud Edith, 'abashed, degraded, and afraid', with Mr. Dombey close at his heels, Carker sneaks about in Dijon:

> 'Some other terror came upon him quite removed from this of being pursued, suddenly like an electric shock, as he was creeping through the streets. Some visionary terror, unintelligible and inexplicable, associated with a trembling of the ground, - a rush and sweep of, something through the air, like Death upon the wing.' (DS, Ch. LV)

He leaves for Paris: 'As he paused...again that flight of Death came rushing up, again went on, impetuous and resistless.'

His flight from Paris to England is described, in paragraph after paragraph, as panoramically and cinematographically as the hurried movement in the Notes, Chuzzlewit, and Dombey itself. The entire journey is like a vision: 'It was a fevered vision of things past and present all confounded together; of his life and journey blended into one. Of being madly hurried somewhere, whither he must go.' Reaching England he takes a train to a countryside station, and lodges at a tavern. He cannot sleep or rest. The image of the monstrous steam engine haunts his mind. What was a fancy at Dijon, is a fact here:

> 'The ground shook, the house rattled, the fierce impetuous rush was in the air! He felt it come up, and go darting by...
>
> 'A curse upon the fiery devil, thundering along so smoothly, tracked through the distant valley by a glare of light and lurid smoke, and gone! He felt as if he had been plucked out of its path, and saved from being torn asunder.' (Ibid.)

Disordered with wine and want of rest he goes out for a lounge, and looks for another devil:

> 'A trembling of the ground, and quick vibration in his ears; a distant shriek; a dull light advancing, quickly changed to two red eyes, and a fierce fire, dropping glowing coals; an irresistible bearing on of a great roaring and dilating mass; a high wind, and a rattle - another come and gone, and he holding to a gate, as if to save himself!' (Ibid.)

He waits for another, and for another. He loiters about the station, and stands close to one, 'watching its heavy wheels and brazen front, and thinking what a cruel power and might it had': 'Ugh! To see the great wheels turning, and to think of being run down and crushed!' Then he goes back to his room:

> 'He still lay listening; and when he felt the trembling and vibration, got up and went to the window, to watch...the dull light changing to two red eyes, and the fierce fire dropping glowing coals, and the rush of the giant as it fled past, and the track of glare and smoke along the valley.' (Ibid.)

And then next morning Mr. Dombey sees him being cut to pieces by a 'remorseless monster':

> 'He heard a shout - another - ...felt the earth tremble - knew in a moment that the rush was come - uttered a shriek - looked round - saw the red eyes, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him - was beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air.' (Ibid.)

Thus the image of the steam engine as 'a type of the remorseless, Death', introduced earlier and revived again, acquires reality, and provides for the exit of an important character in the novel.

The idea of life as a journey undergoes a dramatic transformation here. Mr. Dombey travels to Leamington, and Carker travels from Paris, at very crucial moments, and in a very abnormal state of mind. Both are filled with a sense of defeat, the life of each crystallized into a compelling vision of grave echoes and dark forebodings. But what is especially interesting is that the ruin of both is linked with

'the fiery devil'. Mr. Dombey's rail journey brings about a meeting with Edith, and that entails his final ruin as well as Carker's violent end.

The change from the Notes and Chuzzlewit to Dombey is big. What was mere description or only metaphor before, now becomes an artistic pattern, and not only symbolizes the mood of a character, but gives a fillip to the plot, and contributes to the over-all unity of impression. Staggs's Gardens, Dombey's journey, Carker's death, all join to make this 'business' novel successfully assimilate the great vogue of the mid-eighteen-forties, the railways. The 'old coachman' in Dickens is by no means dead, but he does not seem to be so sensitive about 'the rail'. Holding on to the essential values which have ever claimed his allegiance, he comes to have a very balanced view of the new power. Steam locomotion, and for that matter the entire scientific endeavour it symbolizes, is only a means, and hence neither good nor bad; it is good or bad according as it serves a good or bad end. If the closer and greater knowledge it gives of men and things, is harnessed to social advantage, it becomes an instrument of 'civilisation and improvement', but if it is utilized only to establish an acquisitive industrial culture, it is a 'fiery devil', a type of the remorseless, triumphant monster, Death. And Carker is an apt illustration of the latter case. As Manager of the firm of 'Dombey and Son', he is the best representative of its mercantile marine interests. Thus immediately concerned with steam power on sea, he becomes fatally connected with it on land - its inspired product as well as its hypnotized victim.

There is only a little of railway in Hard Times.[1] There are travellers by express-trains who think the illuminated great factories in Coketown are like Fairy palaces: and there are 'Cheers and Laughter' in the House of Commons when an honourable member gives his view of a railway accident, and tickles the audience by putting the slain widow's cap on the slain cow's head. But the only important appearance of the railway train is when Louisa leaves Bounderby's house and returns to her father. Mrs. Sparsit wrongly believes she is eloping with Mr. Harthouse, and follows her to the station:

> 'The seizure of the station with a fit of trembling, gradually deepening to a complaint of the heart, announced the train. Fire and steam, and smoke, and red light; a hiss, a crash, a bell, and a shriek; Louisa put into a carriage, Mrs. Sparsit put into another: the little station a desert speck in the thunder-storm.' (HT, Bk. II, Ch. XI)

The noise and rush of the train in the midst of a storm of rain and thunder are aptly rendered in crisp and dramatic description, and heighten the tension attending the flight and the chase. Two minds, Louisa's in stern agitation and Mrs. Sparsit's in malicious excitement, are thus effectively revealed. But obviously there is no complexity of design or meaning involved here.

Almost similar is the appearance of the train in Our Mutual Friend.[2]

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1. It may here be mentioned that there are excellent long descriptions of railway journeys in Household Words: 'A Flight' (October 30, 1851) and 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' (October 3, 1857).
2. Reference may here be made to: i) Bk. III, Ch. IX, where as the train clears the stations, they are seen 'shutting up their green eyes and opening their red ones'. The practice is the other way round now; and ii)'POSTSCRIPT', where an incident has been recounted from personal experience. Returning from France with Miss Ellen and Mrs. Ternan, Dickens was involved in a railway accident on 9th June, 1865, near Staplehurst. The shock was severe: he now had 'sudden vague rushes of terror', even in a hansom cab, and 'odd momentary seizures' in a railway carriage.

The Milveys and party are going to attend the wedding of Eugene and Lizzie. They wait for a train at a station, and there Bradley Headstone overhears their talk about Lizzie. He knows from the Reverend Frank Milvey that she is going to marry Eugene, and he is in the grip of a fit. Recommending him to the care of one of the attendants there, the clergyman boards the train with the party:

> 'Then, the train rattled among the house-tops, and among the ragged sides of houses torn down to make way for it, and over the swarming streets, and under the fruitful earth, until it shot across the river: bursting over the quiet surface like a bomb-shell, and gone again as if it had exploded in the rush of smoke and steam and glare. A little more, and again it roared across the river, a great rocket: spurning the watery turnings and doublings with ineffable contempt, and going straight to its end, as Father Time goes to his.' (OMF, Bk. IV, Ch. XI)

Leaving the guilty and stricken Bradley behind, the train conveys the wedding party to their destination. It becomes here a symbol of Time, relentless, disdainful, and irresistible in its course.

There is a humorous dig at the railway administration made in Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy and a business anxiety expressed in Doctor Marigold. But in Mugby Junction Dickens attempts on a much shorter canvas what he attempted in Dombey - he creates a sort of a railway mood, and it is interesting that the image of a junction which probably inspired him with an idea for the story, occurs meaningfully in Dombey. In his railway jargon, Mr. Toodle asks his 'boys and gals' to 'be open':

> "If you find yourselves in cuttings or in tunnels, don't you play no secret games. Keep your whistles going, and let's know where you are." (DS, Ch. XXXVIII)

And then he tells his wife how Rob the Grinder has given him confused thoughts:

"I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where Iam, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man's thoughts is...to-be-sure!" (Ibid.)

Mugby Junction may be seen in metaphorical embryo here, because after all it symbolizes a jumbled stalemate in Mr. Jackson's life. The faithlessness of the only woman he ever loved and the only friend he ever trusted gives him a sense of desolation which is only the more intensified by his success in business. For from a clerk in "Barbox Brothers" he rises to be its sole representative, so that he is the firm. Eventually he abandons everything and seeks refuge in a constant change of scene. Dickens brings the traveller to Mugby Junction, because that fully reflects the state of his mind and heart:

'A place replete with shadowy shapes, this Mugby Junction in the black hours of the four-and-twenty. Mysterious goods trains, covered with palls and gliding on like vast weird funerals, conveying themselves guiltily away from the presence of the few lighted lamps, as if their freight had come to a secret and unlawful end. Half-miles of coal pursuing in a Detective manner, following when they lead, stopping when they stop, backing when they back. Red-hot embers showering out upon the ground, down this dark avenue, and down the other, as if torturing fires were being raked clear; concurrently, shrieks and groans and grinds invading the ear, as if the tortured were at the height of their suffering. Iron-barred cages full of cattle jangling by midway, the drooping beasts with horns entangled, eyes frozen with terror, and mouths too: at least they have long icicles (or what seem so) hanging from their lips. Unknown languages in the air, conspiring in red, green, and white characters. An earthquake, accompanied with thunder and lightning, going up express to London. Now, all quiet, all rusty, wind and rain in possession, lamps extinguished, Mugby Junction deadand indistinct, with its robe drawn over its head, like Caesar.

'Now, too, as the belated traveller plodded up and down, a shadowy train went by him in the gloom which was no other than the train of a life. From whatsoever intangible deep cutting or dark tunnel it emerged, here it came, unsummoned and unannounced, stealing upon him, and passing away into obscurity. Here mournfully went by a child who had never had a childhood or known a parent, inseparable from a youth with a bitter sense of his namelessness, coupled to a man the enforced business of whose best years had been distasteful and oppressive, linked to an

ungrateful friend, dragging after him a woman once beloved. Attendant, with many a clank and wrench, were lumbering cares, dark meditations, huge dim disappointments, monotonous years, a long jarring line of the discords of a solitary and unhappy existence.'[1]

And the maze of life in which the traveller is lost is there before him in the iron network:

'But there were so many Lines. Gazing down upon them from a bridge at the Junction, it was as if the concentrating Companies formed a great Industrial Exhibition of the works of extraordinary ground spiders that spun iron. And then so many of the Lines went such wonderful ways, so crossing and curving among one another, that the eye lost them. And then some of them appearedto start with the fixed intention of going five hundred miles, and all of a sudden gave it up at an insignificant barrier, or turned off into a workshop. And then others, like intoxicated men, went a little way very straight, and surprisingly slued round and came back again. And then others were so chock-full of trucks of coal, others were so blocked with trucks of casks, others were so gorged with trucks of ballast, others were so set apart for wheeled objects like immense iron cotton reels: while others were so bright and clear, and others were so delivered over to rust and ashes and idle wheelbarrows out of work, with their legs in the air (looking much like their masters on strike), that there was no beginning, middle, or end to the bewilderment.'

He believes that he 'must stick for a time to Mugby Junction', because he cannot make up his mind yet 'which iron road to take'. And true to her name and parentage Phoebe, the bed-ridden daughter of Lamps, shows him the way:

"And those threads of railway, with their puffs of smoke and steam changing places so fast, make it so lively for me... I think of the number of people who <u>can</u> go where they wish, on their business, or their pleasure; I remember that the puffs make signs to me that they are actually going while I look; and that enlivens the prospect with abundance of company, if I want company. There is the great Junction, too. I don't see it under the foot of the hill, but I can very often hear it, and I always know it is there. It seems to join me, in a way, to I don't know how many places and things that <u>I</u> shall never see."

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1. Here the train - as apart from the steam engine - appears as a symbol of life, in fact with its literal implication of a succession or series of events.

This suggestion of healthy and well-meaning participation in the interests of others awakens the better nature of Mr. Jackson, and the story of the father and daughter finally makes of 'the gentleman for Nowhere', 'the gentleman for Somewhere'. He does not travel from his birthday any longer, for he has now come to have 'eyes and thoughts for a new external world'. And by extending forgiveness to the woman and the friend who have wronged him and by befriending their child, "Barbox Brothers" becomes "Barbox Brothers and Co."

It is not difficult to see how the entire design has been conceived and executed in terms of the junction image. It is also interesting that its significance changes completely with a change in the angle of vision. It puzzles Mr. Jackson, because he observes it only in relation to himself, and it fascinates Phoebe, because she imagines it in relation to others. Thus in the light of guidance from Phoebe and Lamps, the junction becomes a uniting rather than a dividing symbol.

There is a little of railway in Drood, hovering about Cloisterham and unsettling its traffic, and conveying Rosa from Mr. Jasper's soiling advances at Miss Twinkleton's Seminary to Mr. Grewgious's sheltering care in London. But it is without any significance. Hence it can be said that one of Dickens's novels, i.e., Dombey and Son, and one of his stories, i.e., Mugby Junction, were written in the railway mood, and with Pickwick set against them, they well illustrate the transition from stables to stations. Once again, Chuzzlewit marks the transition, because coach and train both meet in it, and once again the secret of descriptive excellence lies in the Notes. However, the inn of 'the old coaching days' maintains a

romantic hold upon Dickens's imagination, for, after all, the station of the railway age cannot help being itself:

> 'Station very gritty, as a general characteristic. Station very dark, the gas being frozen. Station very cold, as any timber cabin suspended in the air with such a wind making lunges at it, would be. Station very dreary, being a station.' (Household Words, 'Fire and Snow')

It can be said in conclusion that on the basic idea of life as a journey, Dickens set in motion not only the traditional images like 'coach', 'cart', 'gig', 'carriage', and 'tumbril', but also the topical images like 'steam engine' and 'railway train'. And this means a double gain: it adds new units to the operative forces of his imagination, and provides for an evaluation of contemporary advances in mechanical knowledge and industrial endeavour. The coach and the inn and the stable were aesthetically better than the train and the refreshment room and the station are, and perhaps promised greater comfort, too. But Dickens gladly accepts what has come with time. What he never will accept is the preference of 'iron and steel' to 'flesh and blood' whether in individual or social behaviour. That is the real test of morality, and it applies equally to all men everywhere, be they in England or America.

Thus the change from coach to train elicits a mixed reaction from Dickens. If the tremendous new power of steam is to be employed in the service of human values, it is an implement of 'civilisation and improvement'; if, on the other hand, it is to be exploited only for private profit and material aggrandizement, it is a weapon of death and destruction.

2 - THE SHADOW OF THE WALL.

'the shadow of the Marshalsea wall was a real darkening influence ...' - Little Dorrit.

The prison image is perhaps the most important that Dickens ever strove to use for symbolic effect, and this is for a number of obvious reasons. First, the prison entered his life at a most impressionable stage and hurt his innocent pride as a boy. Secondly, it held a topical appeal for his generation. And thirdly, there was in it a scope of vast meaning and profound significance. Thus, direct experience, contemporary interest and historical colour went to make of the prison idea a thing of rare device in the hands of Dickens.

The prison figured freely in the Sketches, and made an increasingly forceful appearance in the subsequent writings. But perhaps it was during the years of his maturity that Dickens handled consciously, and in the interests of symbolic art, what he had approached unwittingly for temperamental reasons, or intentionally on reformative considerations. By 1855 he seems to have clearly realized the inherent power and the attendant advantages of the prison image. In Copperfield he had used it largely in simple reminiscence, but in Dorrit he employed it in a calm representative tone, embodying in it the spirit of the age, and integrating in its terms his entire view of life.

The prison idea is almost as old as man's consciousness of himself in relation to his situation, and runs through the literature of East and West. It is not foreign to the great Hindu epics, and it forms a

special stock of the Persian poetic tradition till this day. The distance between Aeschylus and Shelley is perhaps no less, and Prometheus links them together as strongly by virtue of this very idea. Medieval romance, descending from the saints' lives and the Norse sagas, and passing through the Old German and Old English tales and the Arthurian legend, could not depict the world-old motive of quest without having recourse to the castle and the dungeon. Whether in relation to the forces of nature or in relation to his tribe, his family, or himself, man always experienced resistance and hostility and conflict in one form or another. Most probably Cervantes held up chivalry to ridicule not because he rejected the innate human desire to seek and to dare, but because he saw that what had so far represented that desire did not reflect its new and ever-changing shades in terms of real experience. He realized that knight-errantry gave a faded, out-moded, and hence false picture of life, and he laughed only to suggest that a new idiom was to be found to record human activity. The enchanted castle he did demolish and the Cave of Montesinos he did level up, but the Algiers prison where he had to pass five years did not lose its force as physical fact. The manifest implication was that new delusions were to be imagined for men and new chains conceived.

Bunyan and Defoe, too, had direct contact with the prison, but each exploited it in his own way. Bunyan's religious pre-occupations led his creative energy into the channel of the Miracle Plays and the Moralities, and struck a convincing mean between the extremes of pure abstraction and palpable reality. The 'cage' at the town of Vanity in which Christian and Faithful are shut up and Doubting Castle where

Giant Despair imprisons Christian and Hopeful, clearly show the allegorical value of the prison idea which had confronted Bunyan in real life for twelve years and more. Its vitality served the ends of spiritual endeavour most adequately.

With motives sometimes religious sometimes political in his general intellectual activity, Defoe was primarily concerned with the grosser aspects of life, his interests being rooted deep in the City of Destruction. But within that worldly orbit - and it is by no means narrow - a sense of moral duty and social necessity does exist. Youth should be provided with opportunities of industry, the education of the criminals' children should be a State responsibility, and the Poor Law should be elastic in operation. Failing this, Newgate would stick to a Moll Flanders wherever she be, in London or in Virginia, and a debtor's jail would finally close on the life of a Roxana marked by callous motherhood and poverty and sin and shame.

The prison in Defoe's hands shed the allegorical character Bunyan had given it. He depicted it as it was, with all the low life of misery and vice and crime that inhabited it, and hovered about it. And the style was as far from biblical as Here from Hereafter. In Moll Flanders was made the first real contribution to the organic build of the English novel. Whether it was called forth by the prison idea or by an overpowering character is not easy to ascertain. Moll is born in Newgate, and it is inseparably linked with her. One might even imagine Defoe saying, "I am Moll Flanders",[1] for he had 'lived five months

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1. Bonamy Dobree, Daniel Defoe, (Batavia, 1946), p.20.

in Newgate', and he 'knew all about Moll Flanders and her kind'.

Richardson's attitude to the prison figuring in the novel may be determined from the way he imagined Fielding's coming book Amelia:

> "... Newgate or the Tower;... In the former of which (removed from inns and ale-houses) will some of his next scenes be laid: and perhaps not unusefully; I hope not. But to have done for the present with this fashionable author."[1]

But if Richardson did not admit the conventional type of prison into his work, he felt no scruples in converting a decent countryhouse into a veritable castle dungeon. Only he made the torture mental. Thus, unwittingly, he put the prison closer to a state of mind. While Bunyan brought physical confinement to bear upon the soul, and Defoe primarily on the body, Richardson essentially showed its impact upon the mind. The mental sufferings of Pamela and Clarissa were a decided advance in their minute analysis.

Fielding did not disappoint Richardson: the prison in which Captain Booth meets Miss Matthews is like a microcosm, and rightly does the story of Amelia rise from it. And as with the beginning, so with the end: Newgate comes in with Murphy's forgery and a debtor's prison with Trent's dunning Booth. But even in Joseph Andrews, Jonathan Wild the Great and Tom Jones, Bridewell, Tyburn, Newgate and Gatehouse had appeared, though only occasionally. Two points emerge from his treatment of the prison. First, a benevolent generosity towards the erring is almost always there, perhaps due to an overflow of animal spirits in himself or to a general concern for poverty at grips with vice and crime. Secondly, the satirical vein in him carries a plea for reform in prisons and in the administration of law and justice.

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1. The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, (1804), vol. IV, p. 286.

And it is in this context that he exposed the ignorance of the justices of the peace and the helplessness of the accused in the court.

This sums up the position of a wretch facing trial who was never heard:

> "I thought it hard, I own, that there should be so many of them; my lord, and the court, and the jury, and the counsellors, and the witnesses, all upon one poor man, and he too in chains."[1]

And Fielding can also compare states of feeling in terms of the prison. Sophia is confined in a room:

> 'Western beheld the deplorable condition of his daughter with no more contrition or remorse than the turnkey of Newgate feels at viewing the agonies of a tender wife, when taking her last farewell of her condemned husband; or rather he looked down on her with the same emotions which arise in an honest fair tradesman, who sees his debtor dragged to prison for £10, which, though a just debt, the wretch is wickedly unable to pay.'[2]

Like Richardson's it is a privately improvised prison here, but unlike Richardson's how human are the reactions that it produces! Perhaps Defoe's detachment would not admit of such a soft note.

Smollett had his own direct experience of the King's Bench prison, and in a way his treatment of the prison shows a marked difference. The Newgate galleys appear in Roderick Random rather casually, and so do the Bastille and the Fleet in Peregrine Pickle, and so again the Fleet and Clerkenwell prisons in Humphrey Clinker. While Peregrine's detention in the Fleet is in the nature of a purgatorial experience, the Marshalsea figures rather more significantly in Roderick Random. Miss

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1. Tom Jones, Book VIII, Chapter XI.
2. Tom Jones, Book XVI, Chapter II.

Williams is interrupted by a bailiff, arrested and carried to the Marshalsea, and so is Roderick himself conveyed there against a tailor's bill for "50 l". In the prison he meets Mr. Melopoyn, an "excellent poet" who lives on the bounty of his fellow-prisoners. His "tragedy" is a work of ability, but he is let down by the men of the stage, and his poverty lands him where he is:

> 'Notwithstanding all I had suffered from the knavery and selfishness of mankind, I was amazed and incensed at the base indifference which suffered such uncommon merit as he possessed to languish in obscurity, and struggle with all the miseries of a loathsome jail; ...'[1]

This is something out of the common rut. Literary talent is seen, perhaps for the first time, involved in a vicious labyrinth of neglect and indifference and rotting in a debtor's prison, i.e., the Marshalsea.

Goldsmith seems to have thought imprisonment to be the worst of misfortunes. At least this is the impression that The Vicar of Wakefield appears to give, and probably a shadow of the author's own hard life has entered into the work. Dr. Primrose's independent fortune is lost, his daughter Olivia is seduced by Squire Thornhill, his vicarage is burnt down, and then he is thrown into a debtor's prison.[2]

Mrs. Radcliffe in her tales of mystery and terror had to have recourse to the prison idea, because it is particularly informed with the mysterious and the terrible. The castle of Udolpho in the Appenines where Emily de St. Auburt suffers, or the lone dwelling among

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1. Roderick Random, Chapter LXIV.
2. As is well known, it was this very novel that, through Dr. Johnson, saved Goldsmith from arrest for debt.

the forests on the shore of the Adriatic, which Schedoni in league with Marchesa di Vivaldi chooses for Ellena Rosalba, mark a return to the medieval view of the prison. Mrs. Radcliffe's handling of her material and her execution of the literary design may have a 'much ado about nothing' character, but the vitality of the prison idea as a foil to the reader's curiosity and sympathy is more than manifest.

It was in the very nature of things that the prison figured in the historical romances of Scott. It did not, however, assume any special significance. Isaac the Jew and his daughter Rebecca in the Dungeon, Mary Queen of Scots in Lochleven Castle, Nigel Oliphaunt in the Tower, and John Porteous and Effie Deans in the Tolbooth are all prisoners, each weighed down with the problem of his or her situation. The Tolbooth appears to strike a different note because of the storming that it suffers, but there is nothing suggestive in that. For the rioters would not have taken all the trouble they took, if they could have laid hands on Porteous in some other way. The prison in the novels of Scott invariably means physical confinement and torture and does not go beyond that.

The prison entered the lives of some of the writers discussed above at a time when they had grown into strong human entities. They had firm religious, political, or personal convictions when they suffered confinement. A man like Bunyan would even take it as an essential stage in his spiritual progress, and a man like Defoe could

sing 'A Hymn to the Pillory'. The fortifications had been made long before the attack came, and it was no wonder that it was beaten back. Different in perhaps all else, Bunyan and Defoe were alike in their detachment: neither betrays the pain of a personal experience of the prison.

It was, however, far otherwise with Dickens. The loneliness and misery and humiliation, which his twelfth year had brought him, must remain the most counting factor in any assessment of his treatment of the prison idea. His own drudgery in the blacking warehouse at Hungerford Stairs had filled his soul with the sharpest personal anguish when his father's detention in the Marshalsea added a family shame to it. Life did not leave him as a labouring slave living in the prison of his own mind; it stamped on his tender and sensitive consciousness the deep and awful shadows of a real prison. He wrote in his fragment of autobiography:

> 'The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more, cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.'
>
> 'I never said, to man or boy, how it was that I came to be there, or gave the least indication of being sorry that I was there. That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I.'
>
> 'I was so young and childish, and so little qualified - how could I be otherwise? - to undertake the whole charge of my own existence ...'[1]

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1. Forster, I, II, 26, 28 and 29.

It is against this extraordinary personal background that Dickens's handling of the subject is to be viewed. The prison appears in one sense or another in the great bulk of his work, but what particularly bears upon the theme will claim attention here.

In the Sketches, 'Criminal Courts' (originally entitled 'The Old Bailey'), 'A Visit to Newgate', and 'The Prisoners' Van' may be considered.

In 'Criminal Courts' 'the calm indifference' with which the proceedings are conducted, is suggested very pointedly: 'There is a great deal of form, but no compassion; considerable interest, but no sympathy.' Again what the result of the trial may mean in terms of life is poignantly depicted: 'They resume their places - a dead silence prevails as the foreman delivers in the verdict - "Guilty". A shriek bursts from a female in the gallery; the prisoner casts one look at the quarter from whence the noise proceeded, and is immediately hurried from the dock by the gaoler.' In 'A Visit to Newgate' prisoners of both sexes and ages are shown in the various quarters. The description of the prison chapel reaches its climax with 'the condemned pew'. The author enters into the minds of those who have sat there, and closes the sketch with a long dramatic account of how one marked out for death would pass his last night in the cell. In 'The Prisoners' Van' 'a sordid and rapacious mother' throws her two daughters upon London streets which eventually lead them to the jail. Emily introduces her younger sister to an acquaintance; "here's Bella a-going too for the first time". And here is a full realization of the situation:

> 'What the younger girl was then, the elder has been once; and what the elder then was, she must soon become. A melancholy prospect, but how surely to be realized: a tragic drama, but how often acted! Turn to the prisons and police offices of London - nay, look into the very streets themselves. These things pass before our eyes day after day, and hour after hour - they have become such matters of course, that they are utterly disregarded. The progress of these girls in crime will be as rapid as the flight of a pestilence, resembling it too in its baneful influence and wide-spreading infection. Step by step how many wretched females, within the sphere of every man's observation have become involved in a career of vice frightful to contemplate; hopeless at its commencement, loathsome and repulsive in its course, friendless, forlorn, and unpitied, at its miserable conclusion!' (SB, 'The Prisoners' Van')

This extract may well sum up Dickens's plea and define his approach to prisons and prisoners. The prison here stands out as a grim abode of misery and horror and death, dragging to its doomed cells hundreds of souls whom society neglects as refuse and authority tackles as business. And Dickens confronts it with faith and hope and determination to save and salvage from its ravages as much of humanity and life as possible. He has so identified himself with every suffering young soul that he appears to mourn his own defeat when it is lost, and celebrate his own victory when it is won back.

Passing from the Sketches to Pickwick Papers means following a few stray roots to the well-formed trunk: it is a case of real, visible growth. The treatment of the prison theme here reflects very significantly its power to reveal and affect, and its scope to rise and expand. However, the emphasis now is not on its Newgate aspect but on its Marshalsea and Fleet variations. There is discernible an autobiographical touch, and rising from it an appalling sense of waste which, at times, assumes even philosophical proportions.

The prison first figures in Pickwick in an indirect way, that is, in an interpolated story which Mr. Pickwick among others hears from old Jack Bamber at the Magpie and Stump. It is entitled 'The Old Man's Tale about the Queer Client' and opens in 'the smallest of our debtors' prisons - the Marshalsea':

> '... poverty and debauchery lie festering in the crowded alleys, want and misfortune are pent up in the narrower prison; an air of gloom and dreariness seems, in my eyes at least, to hang about the scene, and to impart to it, a squalid and sickly hue.'
>
> 'How soon have those same eyes, deeply amber in the end, glared from faces wasted with famine, and sallow from confinement, in days when it was no figure of speech to say that debtors rotted in prison, with no hope of release, and no prospect of liberty!'
>
> 'Twenty years ago, that pavement was worn with the footsteps of a mother and child, who, day by day, so surely as the morning came, presented themselves at the prison gate:' (PP, Ch.XXI)

There are here clear traces of reminiscence, and the partiality for financial delinquency as against moral, expressed at the opening of the tale, is perhaps as much motivated by personal affliction as by social understanding:

> 'The condemned felon has as good a yard for air and exercise in Newgate, as the insolvent debtor in the Marshalsea prison.' (Ibid.)

Again, when the prison appears directly in the action of the novel, a sense of balance is seen to operate. Dickens is therefore capable of grading his sympathy for those whom a prison confines. Debtors and Chancery victims within its walls seem to move him much more than Newgate-birds. But he can admit of discrimination even between two debtors in prison. He shows this only too well when Mr. Pickwick enters the Fleet

and takes his first notice of 'the noise, and the beer, and the tobacco smoke, and the cards' -

> "It strikes me, Sam, that imprisonment for debt is scarcely any punishment at all."
>
> "Think not, Sir?" inquired Mr. Weller.
>
> "You see how these fellows drink, and smoke, and roar," replied Mr. Pickwick. "It is quite impossible that they can mind it much."
>
> .....
>
> "I'll tell you wot it is, Sir; them as is always a idlin' in public houses it don't damage at all, and them as is alvays a vorkin' ven they can, it damages too much. 'It's unekal,' as my father used to say ven his grog worn't made half-and-half - 'It's unekal, and that's the fault on it.' " (PP, Ch. XL)

This strikes perhaps the key-note of the Dickensian ethics. At least it fairly defines his view and sense of loss. The good that does not try or wish to save itself, he only sees in pity and horror, and paints as a grim warning; but the good that wishes or fights to preserve itself he champions in all sympathy and full suffering, and presents as the immediate concern of collective life.

The chapters on the Fleet fill the reader with a terrible sense of waste. The description of the prison with its 'wretched dungeons', its 'poor side', its 'money-box', its 'snuggery' and its 'whistling shop' lays a proper setting and the practices like 'Chumming' add a touch of irony to it:

> '... the three chums informed Mr. Pickwick in a breath, that money was, in the Fleet, just what money was out of it;' (PP, Ch. XLI).

While men, women, and children remarkable only for 'emaciation and misery' make the picture real, the ghost-like creatures like 'NO: 20', who is a mere figure, scarcely worth a name (and who unlike Byron's Prisoner of Chillon could not regain his 'freedom with a sigh'), and the cobbler, who "was sixty by years and Heaven knows how old by imprisonment", and the Chancery prisoner, whose bones 'the iron teeth of confinement and privation had been slowly filing ..... down for twenty years' and whose body the law had, lend an unearthly air to the whole scene. And it is wonderful that Dickens produces this sense of waste through humour as through pathos. Jingle delivers the 'singular summary of his prospects in life':

> "Everything - Job's too - all shirts gone - never mind - saves washing. Nothing soon - lie in bed - starve - die - Inquest - little bone-house - poor prisoner - common necessaries - hush it up - gentlemen of the jury - warden's tradesmen - keep it snug - natural death - coroner's order - workhouse funeral - serve him right - all over - drop the curtain." (PP, Ch. XLI)

And the body of the Chancery prisoner awaits the mockery of an inquest:

> 'The body! It is the lawyer's term for the restless whirling mass of cares and anxieties, affections, hopes, and griefs, that make up the living man. The law had his body, and there it lay, clothed in grave clothes, an awful witness to its tender mercy.' (PP, Ch. XLIV)

In fact, this deep note is sounded the moment Mr. Pickwick steps into the Fleet. He is sitting for his portrait when Sam Weller says:

> "There's a Dutch clock, Sir."
>
> "So I see," observed Mr. Pickwick.
>
> "And a bird-cage, Sir," says Sam. "Veels vithin veels, a prison in a prison. Ain't it, Sir." (PP, Ch. XXXIX)

Again, one of the inmates of the 'poor side' of the Fleet is described:

> 'There was a lean and haggard woman, too - a prisoner's wife - who was watering, with great solicitude, the wretched stump of a dried-up, withered plant, which, it was plain to see, could never send forth a green leaf again; - too true an emblem, perhaps, of the office she had come to discharge.' (PP, Ch. XLI)

And this marks the end of Mr. Pickwick's exploratory activities in the company of Sam Weller and Job Trotter:

> 'There was the same squalor, the same turmoil and noise, the same general characteristics in every corner; in the best and the worst alike. The whole place seemed restless and troubled; and the people were crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an uneasy dream.'
>
> "I have seen enough," said Mr. Pickwick, as he threw himself into a chair in his little apartment. "My head aches with these scenes, and my heart too. Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room." (PP, Ch. XLIV)

The languishing ghastly figures of the Chancery prisoner, the cobbler, and NO: 20 convey a sense of human loss through the impact of a long stretch of time on life confined in narrow limited space. Perhaps this is a preparatory stage for the character-gallery of later years - Miss Flite, Mr. Gridley and Rick and, of course, more obviously William Dorrit and Dr. Manette. At least the image of the 'lean haggard woman' watering 'the wretched stump of a dried-up, withered plant', which links human life with plant life, seems to point to the symbolic pattern of Bleak House, and similarly suggestive of the future possibilities are the images of the Dutch clock and the bird-cage which animate Sam Weller's 'philosophical remark'.

This immense and dreadful waste, which the prison reveals, may perhaps account for the change taking place in the character of Mr. Pickwick and his friends. The reviewer in Fraser's[1] thought that

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1. "Charles Dickens and David Copperfield", Fraser's Magazine, December, 1850.

this impaired the artistic ensemble of Pickwick, while Edmund Wilson believes that the novel, 'from the moment it really gets under way, heads by instinct, as it were, unconsciously straight for the Fleet prison'. It is there that 'the whole book will deepen with a new dimension of seriousness'.[1]

Almost at the time when Dickens was depicting in Pickwick a waste brought about by financial delinquency, he started portraying in Oliver another waste enacted by moral delinquency - the same which had once claimed his attention in the Sketches. But the two wastes were not distant from each other; in fact, they were closely related. And Dickens had experienced their kinship in his own early life:

> 'I know that I lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.'[2]

Psycho-analysis may develop this confession into a rebel-criminal thesis, but in spite of the exceptional brilliance with which Edmund Wilson has made out the case, it is not easy to accept it in all its implications. Dickens's special interest in prisons and prisoners and its evidence in his work from the Sketches onwards had mostly been noted as far back as 1896.[3] Perhaps the psychological keenness of Wilson's criticism would have been better received if Dickens's early work had been appreciated in the context of the

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1. Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges', The Wound and the Bow (1942), p.19.
2. Forster, I, II, 28.
3. Alfred Trumble: In Jail with Charles Dickens, (1896).

eighteen-thirties. Because, although the present-day critic has an advantage over that of Dickens's own time in the knowledge of his private life, he is likely to isolate his subject from the literary scene to which it belonged. For instance, some of Dickens's contemporaries would like to place Oliver between Bulwer Lytton's Paul Clifford and W.H. Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard, dubbing them all 'Newgate' novels. In the slightly earlier 'silver-fork' stuff, like Lytton's Pelham, a Byronic hero appeared in a Radcliffian mould, but in the Newgate school the low-life rogue[1] replaced him, though in the same sensational setting. Perhaps at this stage the rebel-criminal label would stick as well on others as on Dickens.

Dickens's interest in low life and crime was not an unconscious process. At least the 1841 edition of Oliver 'with author's preface' does not show this. It was a strong and spirited reply to the critics:

> 'I saw no reason, when I wrote this book, why the very dregs of life, so long as their speech did not offend the ear, should not serve the purpose of a moral, at least as well as its froth and cream. Nor did I doubt that there lay festering in Saint Giles's as good materials towards the truth as any flaunting in Saint James's.'

As to 'the miserable reality' of the criminals' lives, he had met with it in Hogarth's art, and as to 'certain allurements and fascinations', which are thrown around them, John Gay's Beggar's Opera was not without these. And if he were to 'look for examples, and for precedents, I find them in the noblest range of English literature. Fielding, Defoe, Goldsmith, Smollett, Richardson, Mackenzie - all these for wise purposes, and especially the two first, brought upon the scene the very scum and

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1. Thackeray in his parody Catherine attacked this new tendency to exalt crime to the heroic.

refuse of the land.'

In view of this, the earlier survey of the prison theme acquires a greater measure of relevance. For with the writing of this important preface Dickens must have become a great deal more conscious of how the field of crime and punishment had been covered before him.

The critic of Dickens after 1934,[1] with his more intimate knowledge of the novelist's emotional life, sometimes tries to force back the stream of his later years into the channels of his early career, and is delighted to see it flow all over again as, in fact, it did not. It may perhaps be suggested that the rebel-criminal view can admit of a little wholesome twist in the very context of the robber-vagabond confession. Faced with all the temptations and dangers of his situation he, as any other boy similarly placed, might have gone the way of crime and ruin. <u>But he did not go that way</u>. God's mercy saved him, and never could he forget the bliss of having been saved. For had not he been himself trembling on the edge of the precipice yawning before him? He must do his all to save all young souls whom poverty and neglect had marked out for the devil. "Feed them sufficiently and satisfactorily and take good care of them or their trials will be many and hard" - this would seem to be his line of address to society. And why should not he sympathize with a Sikes or a Nancy? After all they were what Oliver, or he himself, would have been if the mercy of God had not intervened.

Dickens, then, joined the 'Newgate' vein with a clear purpose

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1. Thomas Wright first disclosed the Dickens-Ternan story in the <u>Daily Express</u> of 3rd April, 1934.

which had welled up from the depths of his own suffering soul, and he directed the sensational energy of this type of novel into a course of fellow-feeling and humanity. In Oliver the setting was a 'Newgate' one, but Dickens grafted upon it a new motif, so that the result was far ahead of the straight philanthropy of Paul Clifford.

The workhouse with its Bumbles and Limbkinses and the den near Field Lane with its Fagins and Sikeses are virtually prisons, one of charity and the other of crime; and Dickens links them doubly together: through Oliver as a spirit of helpless good, and through Monks as a shadow of mysterious villainy. It is a tremendous waste that these prisons suggest, and the enormousness of the human loss is revealed in three ways - Oliver fighting against evil, Nancy torn between evil and good, and Sikes lost to evil. Bumble and Fagin and Monks moving between them, belong to a class beyond Sikes's. They are the forces that cause waste - they are EVIL. Fagin in the condemned cell is nothing like Sikes on the house-top. There is a certain tragic charm hovering about Sikes, because Dickens depicted him as a part of the waste. Otherwise Nancy would not have cared so much for him. When a church-bell strikes eight o'clock, she thinks sentimentally of the "fine young chaps" then being hanged. But Sikes is unmoved, and she says:

> "Wait a minute! ..... I wouldn't hurry by, if it was you that was coming to be hung, the next time eight o'clock struck, Bill. I'd walk round and round the place till I dropped, if the snow was on the ground, and I hadn't a shawl to cover me." (OT, Ch. XVI)

Again, she says to Rose Maylie:

> "I must go back ..... because among the men I have told you of, there is one: the most desperate among them all: that I can't leave; no, not even to be saved from the life I am leading now." (OT, Ch. XL)

And yet again with a touch of presentiment:

> "Whether it is God's wrath for the wrong I have done, I do not know; but I am drawn back to him through every suffering and ill usage: and should be, I believe, if I knew that I was to die by his hand at last." (Ibid.)

Nancy's above all - even more than Oliver's - is the character that heightens this sense of waste. She serves evil by entrapping Oliver, helps good by standing up for him, and sacrifices salvation for the sake of Sikes. Her choice is love, and that choice fails her. And her end is a cry in the wilderness. Except perhaps in Magwitch in Great Expectations, never again did Dickens catch good and evil in a character in such close and real conflict, but surely never to such desolate effect. It was no wonder that he acted her death over and over again even against medical advice.

In a way Oliver marks an advance on Pickwick. Although Newgate with its condemned cell and the gallows are always in the background, it is not the actual prison that engages Dickens's immediate attention. What commands his interest here is that prison in social life which is partly laid under the divine wings of charity and partly under the shadows of the criminal underworld, so that the real prison appears to be a natural extension of it. Thus alone could he show the wretched associates in crime 'as they really are, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great, black, ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they may.'

And this would be, he believed, 'a service to society' - perhaps it would feed its young members 'sufficiently and satisfactorily' and take all care of them and so arrest the waste spreading over life at its very inception.

Barnaby may well be regarded as having held the background of Dickens's treatment of the prison idea, because it was perhaps the 'proposed novel' of 1834[1] which he intended to cut up into 'little magazine sketches'. 'Instead of coming out in the threepenny numbers of Master Humphrey's Clock in 1841, it should have appeared in all the traditional dignity of 'three compact indiwidual wollumes' at the end of 1836.'[2] In addition to the fact of falling into imaginative abeyance, Barnaby brings in the matter of Scott's influence, and Carlyle's, too. The early inspiration for a historical novel about the riots of 1780 came from The Heart of Midlothian, but being held over it obviously received the impact of The French Revolution. In The Heart of Midlothian the Tolbooth and the gallows occupy only the foreground of the scene, and do not reflect any deep or suggestive treatment. They just are instruments of confinement and death. Nor is the lawless activity given any mysterious character. But in Barnaby the unruly mobs and their riotous deeds do assume a certain preternatural aspect, and this appears to be due to Carlyle:

> 'Social Explosions have in them something dread, and as it were mad and magical; ..... These Explosions and Revolts ripen, break forth like dumb dread Forces of Nature; and yet they are Men's forces; and yet we are part of them; The Daemonic that is in man's life has burst out on us, will sweep us too away!' (The French Revolution).

1. Letters, I, 29.
2. Butt and Tillotson, p. 77.

What happens when the norm of individual life is seriously disturbed Dickens possibly knew from Scott through Madge Wildfire, and what happens when the norm of collective life is rudely shaken he probably learnt from Carlyle through his mob scenes. And perhaps herein lay the secret of the change to 'Barnaby Rudge' from the original title 'Gabriel Vardon, the Locksmith of London'. A 'doubtful, uncertain, and twilight sort of rationality'[1] would better represent a 'Social Explosion'. Dickens undoubtedly tried to heighten the symbolic intent of this graft of Scott upon Carlyle when he introduced Grip into the story with its "I'm a devil!" In the preface to Barnaby he referred - half-seriously, of course, - to a raven's preternatural qualities.

When once let loose, mob fury would naturally assert its kinship with the inmates of Newgate and Bedlam. The motives for Dickens's giving the prison a central position in the scheme of the novel may have been personal, and he may have felt - and to Edmund Wilson it is obvious - 'satisfaction in demolishing the sinister old prison, which, rebuilt, had oppressed him in childhood'. But for all that, Newgate does not play any distinct symbolic role here; it just marks a climax of mob frenzy in the novel as, of course, it did in fact, and it demanded of Dickens all the privileges to which a climax in a work of art is entitled.

Thus perhaps it is not easy to accept the view that the storming of Newgate 'completely obliterates' the effect of Dickens's avowed aims.

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1. The Heart of Midlothian, Chapter XXX.

Nowhere does the reader think approvingly of 'these shameful tumults', not even in front of Newgate where Gabriel Vardon's grim heroic figure stands firm as a rock. The misunderstanding is probably caused by overlooking the fact that Dickens designed the novel so as to incorporate two motifs. He was to expose a false 'religious cry' and condemn 'intolerance and persecution', but he was also to bring into the limelight 'the flourishing condition' of the hangman's trade and present sympathetically, in the vein of Oliver as it were, the cases like Mary Jones's. And he makes both these currents merge in each other wonderfully. He not only shows how mischief in the person of "Muster" Gashford exploits a vain dupe and religious maniac like Lord Gordon; he also reveals how the aristocratic decency of Sir John Chester is the author of a creature "more brute than man". This implies that a wire-puller like Gashford - even with the lower tier anarchy of Simon Tappertit at his back - could never have brought about the dreadful destruction of life and property, if there had not been the striking arm of a daredevil like Hugh. Society should, therefore, beware of the activity of Gashfords as well as provide against the possibility of Hughs. Cries like 'No Popery' are 'senseless, besotted, inveterate, and unmerciful', but so also are the perpetrations like 'Mary Jones'.

It is perhaps Dickens's emphasis on this topical element that gives the gallows - rather than Newgate - a symbolic significance and links it with Oliver. For there he had fully realized how 'the great, black, ghastly gallows' always closed up the prospect of the miserable criminals. Again, in words not very much different, Fagin had told his

young associates what "object number one" with them was:

> "The gallows, ... the gallows, my dear, is an ugly finger-post, which points out a very short sharp turning ..... keep in the easy road, and keep it at a distance ....." (OT, Ch. XLIII)

Dickens voices his 'open concern with the social horror of hanging'[1] thus in Barnaby:

> 'It was a thing so common, that very few were startled by the awful sentence, or cared to question its propriety. Just then, too, when the law had been so flagrantly outraged, its dignity must be asserted. The symbol of its dignity, - stamped upon every page of the criminal statute-book, - was the gallows; and Barnaby was to die.' (BR, Ch. LXXVI)

But it is not Barnaby alone. There is Hugh too, for, far more than Sikes, and perhaps as much as Nancy, he has been depicted as human loss. Even as the beast he is, he can tenderly remember how his dog was "the only living thing except me that howled ..... when they hung up my mother up at Tyburn for a couple of thousand men to stare at". And then he can appeal for Barnaby's life; "See what he is! - Look at him!" Dickens describes him as "a savage prophet whom the near approach of death had filled with inspiration', and puts in his mouth such poetry as can perhaps approach Shakespeare's own. Once before in Nickleby he had attempted something like this, and at a similar moment - in sight of the gallows. But Ralph Nickleby had chosen it himself and his challenge to the "iron tongue" of time rings somewhat slight: it is a defeated villain's hateful lament. But having despaired of Barnaby's release, Hugh spurns society and law and authority, indeed life itself, when he says -

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1. Butt and Tillotson, p. 86.

> "What else should teach me - me, born as I was born, and reared as I have been - to hope for any mercy in this hardened, cruel, unrelenting place! Upon these human shambles, I, who never raised this hand in prayer till now, call down the wrath of God! On that black tree of which I am the ripened fruit, I do invoke the curse of all its victims, past, present, and to come." (BR, Ch. LXXVII)

It is a dreadful waste that the book as a whole unfolds before the reader. The cry of 'No Popery' means that there is no peace of soul or security of body, and the practice of 'Mary Jones' - as Hugh states it - proves that society lacks the faith to do good and fails to give hope to those who may yet be capable of hope. Thus the whole pageant of existence is a vast shameful tumult as well as a regular process of execution.

Perhaps it is clear that it was not the satisfaction of demolishing Newgate but the additional motif of condemning the hanging 'trade' that gave a complex impression to the story. And this complexity Dickens achieved not at the cost of 'his right-minded' declarations but to the greater credit and realization of his avowed objects.

In Copperfield the prison figures very prominently and in various ways. First of all, Salem House, and Murdstone and Grinby's, with their repression and punishment and misery, stifle young David's spirit with all the confinement of a prison. Then there is the actual King's Bench Prison in which Mr. Micawber is lodged as a debtor and which darkens the lives of the Micawbers till the very moment of their emigration to Australia. Finally there is the model prison

which is run according to 'the system' and which enshrines such choice spirits as Uriah Heep and Littimer. As is well known, David's life at Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse in Blackfriars, Mr. Micawber's "difficulties" and the hardships of his family during his detention are drawn from Dickens's own life, and almost all the passages quoted earlier from his fragmentary autobiography also form extracts from Copperfield. The whole account is extremely touching, but is only less so in the novel than in reality. For, however close David might be to the Micawbers, he is not one of them, and Mr. Micawber is not to him what John Dickens was to young Charles. The impact of a family shame on the mind of a toiling child has not been represented here, but a boyish attachment instead connects the sufferings of an imprisoned debtor's family with the pains of juvenile drudgery. Nevertheless, the autobiographical element - and the same form of narration - is so powerful and persistent that even this major emotional shift has not produced that imaginative distancing which is essential to the execution of a symbolic design. The prospect looms right over young David's eyes, and the King's Bench Prison remains only a prison, because it points to nothing beyond itself.

In Chapter LXI Dickens shows John Howard's reformatory cellular system in practice, and his adverse criticism reveals Carlyle's influence as well as his own sense of balance exhibited in Pickwick. Carlyle's satirical essay 'Model Prisons' was published in March 1850, and the last numbers, XIX and XX, of Copperfield which include Chapter

LXI were written between 22nd September and 22nd or 23rd October, 1850.[1] In condemning a system which aimed at securing professions of 'contrition and repentance' from confirmed cheats and robbers by means of beef and cocoa and milk, Dickens probably followed Carlyle. But, as suggested above, he had already shown discrimination in this regard:

> 'The condemned felon has as good a yard for air and exercise in Newgate as the insolvent debtor in the Marshalsea prison.' (PP, Ch. XXI)

Dickens was not prepared even to equate a debtor with a thief. How could he tolerate villains and ruffians living comfortably in hygienic conditions while honest workmen starved in wretched hovels! No wonder then that he pronounced the whole 'business' of model prisons 'rotten' and 'hollow'.

Two of the titles so far, namely, 'The Old Curiosity Shop' and 'Dombey and Son', had borne a measure of significance. The latter especially conveyed the general urge towards self-perpetuation of the moneyed class through a particular commercial house. But far more suggestive were 'Bleak House' and 'Hard Times', and the alternative forms considered for each show that it was not a simple search for a better-sounding name as in the case of 'David Copperfield'.[2] The title was required to reveal fully a view of society in the one case and a 'philosophy' of life in the other.

In Pickwick the responsibility for the prolonged slow waste of life seems to be laid entirely at the door of authority, but things are

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1. Butt and Tillotson, pp. 172-3.
2. Butt and Tillotson, pp. 114 and 201.

different in Bleak House. Chancery is no doubt depicted as a befogged place where parasites thrive on hosts, but there is a touch of mystery here that gives it a strange power. Richard Carstone knows that "old Tom Jarndyce in despair blew his brains out at a coffee-house in Chancery Lane", and he whispers "Mad!" when he hears Miss Flite talk about "youth, and hope, and beauty" in connexion with Chancery. Over and over again he expresses his dread and distrust of it. Esther records his impression of Krook's:

> 'One had only to fancy, as Richard whispered to Ada and me while we all stood looking in, that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete.' (BH, Ch. V)

And Mr. Krook's warning is both sincere and stern. He is greeting Tom Jarndyce:

> "He got into a restless habit of strolling about when the cause was on, or expected, talking to the little shop-keepers, and telling 'em to keep out of Chancery, whatever they did. 'For,' says he, 'it's being ground to bits in a slow mill; it's being roasted at a slow fire; it's being stung to death by single bees; it's being drowned by drops; it's going mad by grains.' " (Ibid.)

Later, Rick addresses Ada on the same subject, this time with a sigh:

> "Ah, cousin, cousin, it's a weary word this Chancery! "
>
> .....
>
> "Ah, cousin! ..... Strange, indeed! all this wasteful wanton chess-playing is very strange. To see that composed Court yesterday jogging on so serenely, and to think of the wretchedness of the pieces on the board, gave me headache and the heartache both together. My head ached with wondering how it happened, if men were neither fools nor rascals; and my heart ached to think they could possibly be either ....."
>
> .....

> "At all events, Chancery will work none of its bad influences on us. We have happily been brought together, thanks to our good kinsman, and it can't divide us now!" (Ibid.)

Yet Chancery does work its worst influences on Rick, it does divide those happily brought together, and mistrust instead of thankfulness becomes the good kinsman's reward. Is it then folly, rascality, or madness that takes him to Chancery? Miss Flite knows the secret, and she confides it to Esther:

> ' "But, my dear," she went on, in her mysterious way, "there's a dreadful attraction in the place ..... There's a cruel attraction in the place. You can't leave it. And you must expect."
>
> 'I tried to assure her that this was not so .....
>
> ' "Aye, aye, aye! You think so, because I am a little rambling ..... But, my dear, I have been there many years, and I have noticed. It's the Mace and Seal upon the table."
>
> 'What could they do, did she think?' I mildly asked her.
>
> ' "Draw," returned Miss Flite. "Draw people on, my dear. Draw peace out of them. Sense out of them. Good qualities out of them. I have felt them even drawing my rest away in the night. Cold and glittering devils!" ' (BH, Ch. XXXV)

That gives the clue to Tom Jarndyce, Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite, Rick, all. Is then Chancery to blame, or its victims? At least in the involved ruin of Rick - and by contrast in the detached security of John Jarndyce - Dickens seems to answer the question by dividing the responsibility equally between the slow-killing legal machine and its prey. The sacrifice seeks the altar as much as the altar attracts the sacrifice. It is this bewitching aspect which more than anything else lifts a topicality like Chancery into the domain of art, and the symbolic mud-and-fog setting appears designed to realize this effect. Probably

nothing else could invest a judicial institution with such strange compelling power. Relentless as fate, it needs must have been as mysterious in order to gather into its cage "Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace ....." and much else that is of life. While in Pickwick the Chancery victims suffer an imprisonment of constraint, in Bleak House they suffer an "imprisonment" of choice. It is the delusion of material gain that draws them on to their doom slowly but surely. Perhaps it is the Micawberish strain hovering about the King's Bench Prison, but flowing in deeper and tragic notes mingled with irony - Something may turn up. Wait till Judgment Day!

The prospect, therefore is that of a disintegrating, rotting waste which institutional machinery and human weakness have joined to spread. And this waste gains in sweep when Puseyite charity, telescopic philanthropy and Regency deportment exhibit - each in its own way - their captives suffering or causing suffering, but doing so from choice, not from constraint.

This balanced treatment does not blunt the edge of Dickens's attack in any way. In fact, it is sharpened all the more, for if the temptation be as powerful as cruel, there is greater reason for putting it down. Thus the reader's hostility against Chancery is no less than his resentment against the Fleet prison, but in regard to the slow, wringing torture here he addresses himself as much as he addresses authority. Dickens had gained by this time a far deeper insight into the motives of human activity.

The case of Dorrit is peculiar. Dickens first called it 'Nobody's Fault' and thought it 'a capital name'. Later, however, he changed it to 'Little Dorrit'. But the matter did not end there. Just as the original title had 'persisted in his mind through at least five months, throughout the writing of the first eleven chapters',[1] exactly so it survived in the novel even after it had been cast off. It was 'too narrowly topical', but at the same time it was capable of wide import. As Kathleen Tillotson remarks:

> 'Its meanings are multiple. Beginning as irony, a comment on the tendency to shift responsibility, it becomes a gloomy truth pervading all parts of the novel, as a ground-tone of despair about society.'[2]

The new title, 'Little Dorrit', appealed more to Dickens, because it 'has a pleasanter sound in my ears, and ..... is equally applicable to the same story.' But it is difficult to accept the view that the story could remain 'the same' under either title. After all, it had not been wholly written - there were fifty-nine more chapters yet to follow. Perhaps the character of Little Dorrit herself would not have been under the original title what it is now.[3] Most probably it was due to the change in the title that she came to combine in herself 'the strength and indestructibility of natural innocent virtue' of Oliver Twist and Little Nell with the 'power of affection'[4] of Esther Summerson and Sissy Jupe. Thus two strands kept running through the novel as it was taking shape number after number -

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1. Butt and Tillotson, p. 223.
2. Butt and Tillotson, pp. 232 - 3.
3. Ibid., pp. 230 - 1.
4. John Butt: "The Topicality of Little Dorrit", University of Toronto Quarterly, October, 1959, p. 2.

'Nobody's Fault' controlling social criticism and 'Little Dorrit' administering human relief.

To discuss Dickens's treatment of the prison theme in Dorrit is to discuss in fact almost everything in it. For if in Bleak House he had made 'a great and largely successful effort ..... to integrate the diversity of detail into a single view of society'[1], in Dorrit, he made perhaps a greater effort to integrate a greater diversity of detail into a single view of life. And this he achieved above all through his masterly handling of the prison image.

There is a fundamental difference between how the prison figured in his work earlier and how it did so now. The sentiment and sullenness of the Fleet chapters in Pickwick and the sensation and challenge of the relevant parts of Oliver and Barnaby are found nowhere in Dorrit. The prison is here a matter of ordinary course, a settled fact of life. Perhaps even Chancery, embedded in mud and enshrouded in fog and sapping the life-blood of men, generation after generation, does not bear the unruffled peaceful look of the Marshalsea. This aspect of unconcern in a cruel public institution seems to be rooted in Copperfield where, in the character of Micawber, the torture of imprisonment had been placed in close vicinity to humour. But there was another factor also - the prison gave a security against the world outside, as probably the family of John Dickens had experienced. Mr. Micawber says:

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1. Butt and Tillotson, p. 178.

> "..... And this ..... is the Bench! Where, for the first time in many revolving years, the overwhelming pressure of pecuniary liabilities was not proclaimed, from day to day, by importunate voices declining to vacate the passage; where there was no knocker on the door for any creditor to appeal to; where personal service of process was not required, and detainers were merely lodged at the gate!" (DC, Ch. XLIX)

And the idea recurs amplified in Dorrit. This is Dr. Haggage addressing William Dorrit just after Amy's birth in the Marshalsea:

> "A little more elbow-room is all we want here; there's no knocker here, sir, to be hammered at by creditors and bring a man's heart into his mouth. Nobody comes here to ask if a man's at home, and to say he'll stand on the door mat till he is. Nobody writes threatening letters about money to this place. It's freedom, sir, it's freedom! I have had to-day's practice at home and abroad, on a march and aboard ship, and I'll tell you this: I don't know that I have ever pursued it under such quiet circumstances, as here this day. Elsewhere, people are restless, worried, hurried about, anxious respecting one thing, anxious respecting another. Nothing of the kind here, sir. We have done all that - we know the worst of it; we have got to the bottom, we can't fall, and what have we found? Peace. That's the word for it. Peace." (LD, Bk. I, Ch. VI)

This sense of comparative security issuing from Copperfield and the Rick motif in Bleak House have most probably developed into a staid view of the prison problem as handled in Dorrit. Rick courts suffering and arduously follows the way he has known to be ruinous, and all prisons of choice that confine people outside the prison of constraint, i.e., the Marshalsea, seem to derive their origin from him. Thus if 'Nobody's Fault' is not the Rick idea itself, it is a step next to it. And perhaps it can be said that it underlies 'the gloomy truth' which pervades all parts of Dorrit and is echoed in its 'ground-tone of despair'. Men cannot do without chains; if there are none imposed from without, they will forge some from within. It is in this mood

of acceptance that Dickens proceeded to treat of the prison theme here. And it was well that it was so, for in such a tranquil state of mind alone could he make it into an all-inclusive, all-significant and all-powerful image.

Dickens had so far laid the scene of action of two of his novels away from home. He had crossed the Atlantic in Chuzzlewit and the English Channel in Dombey. But the adventures of young Martin and Mark Tapley and the flight and pursuit of Edith and Carker did not affect the main design as episodes abroad. Nor did they very much strengthen the vital organism of the story. Perhaps any young country falling short of its idealism could have disappointed the fortune seekers, and any foreign land could have sheltered the absconders. But when Dickens spread the canvas of Dorrit over England and Southern Europe, he took a position to which there was probably no alternative. He linked them together, as he was soon after to link together London and Paris in A Tale of Two Cities. Every scene was to be complementary to every other, so that the picture could be whole. Marseilles with its 'blazing sun' and 'universal stare', with its villainous prison and plague-menaced quarantine; London with its Sabbatarian gloom and dissonant bell-ringing, with its close, confined, squalid Marshalsea, and its Circumlocution Office and Bleeding Heart Yard; The Pass of the Great Saint Bernard with its solitudes and mists and shadows; Venice with its picture-galleries and refinement and dilettantism, and Rome with its vast, still ruins

and old Temples and its glorious multitude of rolling fountains - each lives with the other, and all live by virtue of the prison idea.

The prison image operates as a unifying force in Dorrit and permeates through it as spirit through form. It is first of all visible in the situation of the various characters. Blandois and Cavalleto detained in a jail-chamber; 'Fellow Travellers' shut up in a quarantine; Mrs. Clennam confined within a dingy room of her dilapidated, prison-like house; the Dorrits living in and about Marshalsea; Arthur Clennam, whether out of the Marshalsea or in it, always in a blank waste, without "will, purpose, hope"; the Plornishes condemned to the stake in Bleeding Heart Yard and continually battered by the "tug"; Doyce's creative talent caught in the meshes of the Circumlocution Office; The Meagleses entangled in a Barnacle off-shoot named Gowan; Flora lost in the long mazes of aimless speech; Pet fallen in the snares of dilettantism; Miss Wade hemmed in by her own unhappy temper; the 'bosom' and Bar and Bishop and Treasury and Physician and the 'Midas without the ears', all serving Society as its helpless captives - almost the whole population of the novel is in chains, of choice or of constraint, or of both.

It is perhaps interesting to note how Dickens introduces these various characters and is at the same time busy weaving a web which will confine them all together. A broiling universal glare is focussed on Marseilles to bring out the black villainy of Blandois in full relief, and a plague is made to hang oppressively in the atmosphere of the quarantine - a fit place to foreshadow the darkened lives of

Arthur Clennam and Miss Wade. A 'gloomy, close and stale' Sunday evening with its maddening church bells and melancholy streets 'as if the Plague were in the city and the dead-carts were going round' - is a proper prelude to the confined monotony of Mrs. Clennam's life which in turn provides a suitable preview of the Marshalsea and all that is within its walls. With the prison installed in the centre - as on the green cover of the Monthly Numbers - the prospect is rendered wide enough to reveal Bleeding Heart Yard on the one hand and the Circumlocution Office on the other, and the whole is made to cohere by a recurring use of the subsidiary images like the shadow and labyrinth. 'Society' holding in its grip Mr. Merdle's vastest transactions, Mrs. Merdle's 'extensive bosom', and dilettantism with its bond-slave Gowan, are kept in readiness to meet abroad injured respectability which in the person of William Dorrit tries to recover itself among strangers but is ever plagued by the barred shadows of the Marshalsea. Mrs. General's recipes of 'polish' and 'refinement' suggest as much the need of the moment as the appropriate surroundings of fashion and art. But a prison cell cannot be smoothed into a 'surface', and a crater cannot be blocked with 'varnish'. The one must gape, and the other must erupt.

As suggested in the Introduction, expressing his anxiety to make the 'History of a Self-Tormentor' of a piece with the rest of the story, Dickens wrote to Forster, "In Miss Wade I had an idea, which I thought a new one, of making the introduced story so fit into surroundings

impossible of separation from the main story, so as to make the blood of the book circulate through both." Apart from the measure of success he achieved, the nature of his effort claims attention here. What is it that Miss Wade's story has in common with its 'surroundings' in the novel? The answer is not far to seek. In her birth she is like Arthur Clennam and Tattycoram, in her upbringing she is like Mrs. Clennam, or even Arthur Clennam again, and in her temperament she is partly Mrs. Clennam and partly herself. This makes her a prisoner of heredity and disposition. And that indirectly proves that Dickens himself looked upon the prison theme as the blood of Dorrit.

Perhaps the best illustration of how setting, episode, character and idea could be conceived and realized as a single fact of art and in terms of a single image is the creation of William Dorrit. Entering the Marshalsea as a 'very amiable and very helpless middle-aged gentleman' with a portmanteau which he had better not unpack, because "he was going out again directly", he resides there more than twenty years and comes to be known as the Father of the place. He grows to be proud of the title and tends to exaggerate the number of years he has been there. He even becomes vain. He expects every new debtor to be presented to him and looks for a "Testimonial" which is generally in the shape of "Money" and is "too often acceptable". Humoured and pampered by generations of debtors, he makes it "a point of his state" normally to keep on 'the aristocratic ... side of the College-yard' and 'be chary of going among his children on the Poor side'. He tells

the Collegians that to remain a length of time in the prison one needed strength of character, and he finds his brother Frederick wanting in this respect. When Fanny says Amy has disgraced them all by keeping such low company as Old Nandy's, the father advises them to show "Becoming Spirit", and says: "I have done what I could to keep you select here; I have done what I could to retain you a position here." But sometimes reality forces itself on him, and he has to give up self-deception: "What am I worth to any one? A poor prisoner, fed on alms and broken victuals; a squalid, disgraced wretch!"

Thus, now boasting, now despairing, but always "a captive with the jail-rot upon him, and the impurity of the prison worn into the grain of his soul" he lives on. At last there comes a day when the prison wall is "Gone!" He prepares to leave the Marshalsea, and Amy and Arthur Clennam are at his side:

> "Fasten the collar of my shirt, my dear. Mr. Clennam, would you oblige me - hum - with a blue neckcloth you will find in that drawer at your elbow. Button my coat across at the chest, my love. It looks - ha - it looks broader, buttoned."

But riches cannot kill the past. When he remonstrates with Amy upon her being 'lost in the society' at Venice, there is in his whole bearing 'the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall'. He begins to whimper as of old and exclaims that he is "a poor ruin and a poor wretch in the midst of his wealth". In spite of portrait-making and art-galleries this emotional conflict continues more or less controlled

till at last the repressed lava breaks through and rolls forth.

William Dorrit falls as much a martyr to personal vanity as to civil law. The fort of gentility, which he builds within the prison walls, confines him within yet narrower limits. It not only divides the College-yard; it also divides his mind. The conflict he rears in poverty, he cannot shed in riches - it only grows stronger. He adds a prison of choice to a prison of constraint, and the resultant prison expands to hold all humanity within its bounds:

> "Ladies and gentlemen, the duty - ha - devolves upon me of - hum - welcoming you to the Marshalsea. Welcome to the Marshalsea! The space is - ha - limited - limited - the parade might be wider; but you will find it apparently grow larger after a time - a time, ladies and gentlemen - ..." (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XIX)

Is it Frederick's stand against pride and ingratitude vindicated - "the family credit" thrown to the winds and a "judgment" brought upon them? Or, is it Dickens's vision of life in terms of the prison image? Perhaps both.

The Marshalsea is responsible for Dorrit in the same measure as Chancery for Rick. Perhaps Dickens has moved a step further. The prison does inflict suffering, but the prisoner struggles to augment it. Whether through folly or through love, human nature makes its own chains heavier. Waste is a tragic fact of life. It's 'Nobody's Fault'.

Arthur Clennam is another illustration of this very idea, and perhaps wrought with as much psychological keenness, though primarily on an emotional plane. His misfortune is his up-bringing in religious Gradgrindery:

> "I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything; for whom what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence. ..... Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this world and terror in the next - nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere - this was my childhood ....." (LD, Bk. I, Ch. II)

And the void is there when he returns home in middle age:

> "Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words." (Ibid.)

Where can he find the bearings he has lost or has never had? In the maddening Sabbatarian bells? In the sooty melancholy streets? In the dark old house 'leaning on some half-dozen gigantic crutches'? In the invalided prisoner-like mother's 'one glassy kiss, and four stiff fingers muffled in worsted'? Or, in the broad, spoiled and artless Flora, whom he leaves a lily and finds a peony, and who carries a whole Circumlocution Office on her tongue? No, not in these at least can his sympathies take root. What will fill the void he does not know.

Pet awakens a vague desire in his heart, but she leaves him more lost than before. He takes the trembling roses from her hand and kisses it:

> 'At that time, it seemed to him, he first finally resigned the dying hope that had flickered in nobody's heart so much to its pain and trouble.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. XXVIII)

'Nobody's Disappearance' is the title of Chapter XXVIII of Book I which includes this farewell scene. 'Nobody' appears here in another of its multiple meanings. It suggests that nameless, indefinite phase of the human heart which is either an echo of the past or a call of the future. The idea of emotional regeneration at middle age is superbly executed, and as already discussed, Dickens reveals Arthur Clennam's mind and heart through the images of the dying fire, the dark road, the floating roses, and the flowing river. But the image that is most visible and compelling is that of the prison shadows, because it is from their womb that the light of hope shall issue at last.

Little Dorrit, the Child of the Marshalsea, is more of the Marshalsea than the Father of the Marshalsea. He does not fully deserve the title he is given: he is chary of seeing his children on the Poor side. But the Child is a true child. She springs up from the prison, and she lives on in the prison. Whether in the Marshalsea or out of it, whether abroad or at home, the one reality that pervades her consciousness is that of the prison, and the one power that commands her behaviour is truth. No self-deception clouds her vision or mars her manner, for she accepts the prison as it is and as she is. And thus it is by facing fact with truth that she transcends it.

Dickens preferred to call the novel after her, because her name fell more pleasantly on his ear. But perhaps the instinct of genius also realized in that sound the vast possibilities which eventually

became a reality. She is thus very much more than a character. She is a presence, an influence, a benediction. Old Dorrit, Maggy and Old Nandy, Arthur Clennam - Somebody, Everybody, Nobody - her healing wings cover all.

This is how the characterization in Dorrit derives its tone and spirit from the prison idea as in turn it gives it flesh and bone. The entire setting and the whole atmosphere of the novel breathe of it. This effect Dickens has achieved chiefly through his rare descriptive power. The glorious art of the fog-opening of Bleak House appears here in passage after passage, even passing into sentence and phrase.

The jail at Marseilles is under the 'universal stare':

> 'A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damps, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim. Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside; and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact, in one of the spice islands of the Indian Ocean." (LD, Bk. I, Ch. I)

Tip, in the Marshalsea, begins to execute commissions in a knowing manner,

> 'and to be of the prison prisonous, and of the streets streety.' (LD, Bk. I, Ch. VI)

This is not coining; it is perfection itself.

The prison affects the Dorrits "unekally", as Sam Weller might have said. They react to it each in his or her own way. Dickens shows through each the waste it causes, but through Little Dorrit he primarily reveals its immense and profound significance.

She is sitting in the travelling-carriage:

'All that she saw was new and wonderful, but it was not real; it seemed to her as if those visions of mountains and picturesque countries might melt away at any moment, and the carriage, turning some abrupt corner, bring up with a jolt at the old Marshalsea gate.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. III)

She watched the water flowing in the Grand Canal:

'And then she would lean upon her balcony, and look over at the water, as though they all lay underneath it. When she got to that, she would musingly watch its running, as if, in the general vision, it might run dry, and show her the prison again, and herself, and the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed.' (Ibid.)

Her view of their life at Venice is her own:

'It appeared on the whole, to Little Dorrit herself, that this same society in which they lived, greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea. Numbers of people seemed to come abroad, pretty much as people had come into the prison; through debt, through illness, relationship, curiosity, and general unfitness for getting on at home. They were brought into these foreign towns in the custody of couriers and local followers, just as the debtors had been brought into the prison. They prowled about the churches and picture-galleries, much in the old, dreary, prison-yard manner. They were usually going away again to-morrow or next week, and rarely knew their own minds, and seldom did what they said they would do, or went where they said they would go: in all this again, very like the prison debtors ..... They had precisely the same incapacity for settling down to anything, as the prisoners used to have; they rather deteriorated one another, as the prisoners used to do ... still, always like the people in the Marshalsea.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. VII)

Of course the company she has here is very representative: Mrs. General stands for refinement, Mr. Gowan for dilettantism, Mr. Sparkler for 'Society' and Monsieur Blandois for villainy.

She wanders alone in Old Rome:

> 'The ruins of the vast old Amphitheatre, of the old Temples, of the old commemorative Arches, of the old trodden highways, of the old tombs, besides being what they were, to her, were ruins of the old Marshalsea - ruins of her own old life - ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it - ruins of its loves, hopes, cares, and joys. Two ruined spheres of action and suffering were before the solitary girl often sitting on some broken fragment; and in the lonely places, under the blue sky, she saw them both together.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XV)

And Dickens extends this abode of 'action and suffering' heavenward and, of course, through the prison image:

> 'The last day of the appointed week touched the bars of the Marshalsea gate. Black, all night, since the gate had clashed upon Little Dorrit, its iron stripes were turned by the early-glowing sun into stripes of gold. Far aslant across the city, over its jumbled roofs, and through the open tracery of its church towers, struck the long bright rays, bars of the prison of this lower world.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XXX)

Thus does the Marshalsea wall girdle round the habitable globe, enclosing men's vanities and follies and their actions and sufferings, and thus does the ephemeral pass into the eternal and become immortal.

It is again by virtue of the prison image that Dickens makes the various topicalities fit so well into the main fabric of the novel. Sabbatarianism contributes to the atmosphere in which a man in the void like Clennam can return home. The labyrinthine coils of red-tapism behind the Crimean disasters can entangle the destiny of William Dorrit, discourage the inventive powers of Doyce, and set the tone and flow of Flora's speech. Frauds like Sir John Paul and John Sadleir can build the pattern of society over which Mr. Merdle presides, the 'bosom' adorns, and Bar and Bishop and Treasury and Physician and Chief Butler hang on, and which the Dorrits woo and emulate only to their second

and worse ruin. As John Butt says:

> ' he (Dickens) had already taken imaginative stock of the situation when some fresh event occurred to confirm his diagnosis and to supply him with an illustrative example.'[1]

And perhaps the prison idea formed the medium of this imaginative stock-taking.

In A Tale of Two Cities the prison idea marks retrospection as well as advance. The old theme of long imprisonment is studied in an individual aspect, but under the social and political impact of a revolution. The book opens with Dr. Manette 'RECALLED TO LIFE' from the Bastille. It is like beginning Dorrit with William Dorrit's release from the Marshalsea. He proceeded thus perhaps because he did not wish to repeat Dorrit, or perhaps it was necessitated by the weekly publication of the story, a considerable part of which had consequently to be unfolded in flashback - Doctor Manette's sufferings, their genesis and issue - thus providing far more drama. And this was exactly what the swift revolutionary pace of the action required. Again, in this Dickens perhaps looked back to some of the scenes in Barnaby and placed himself more immediately under Carlyle's influence which had rarely been on the wane.

Nevertheless, the spirit of the story reveals a great difference. For the first time love is brought into a sharp focus. The prison had all along stood against social, domestic, or individual happiness but never against conjugal affection. The Fleet, the King's Bench and the Marshalsea prisons caused family misery, but they did not raise a

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1. John Butt: "The Topicality of Little Dorrit", University of Toronto Quarterly, October, 1959, p. 8.

barrier between man and wife. Nor did Newgate entirely shut out one from the other's view. But in the Tale Dickens interposes the prison wall between husband and wife, and it is at a very strategic point that he arrests married life - a young couple with a baby. Passion has not yet been very much domesticated, and its thirst has been all the more whetted by the newly-found sense of parenthood. Here is involved then youthful love as well as family happiness. A child in the circumstances not only opens vast possibilities of pathos, but signifies the continuity of life and so extends the scope of symbolic import. The prison thus stops the course of love and threatens the future of humanity. Dickens repeats the situation to stress the idea - first the Bastille stands between Dr. Manette and his wife and child, then La Force and the Conciergerie separate Charles Darnay from his wife and child. The fact that Dr. Manette suffered under the aristocracy and Charles Darnay under the revolutionary regime, shows Dickens's belief in values rather than in camps. And what ultimately releases life from bonds and ensures its flow is the supreme individual act of sacrifice at the altar of love.

Dickens brings the gallows back on the scene, and presents it as an ally of the Bastille. Monsieur the Marquis's carriage runs over and kills a child, whose father murders him and is arrested and imprisoned and hanged:

> "..... in the morning, by the fountain, there is raised a gallows forty feet high, poisoning the water."
>
> 'The mender of roads looked through rather than at the low ceiling, and pointed as if he saw the gallows somewhere in the sky.'

> "... On the top of the gallows is fixed the knife, blade upwards, with its point in the air. He is hanged there forty feet high - and is left hanging, poisoning the water."
>
> "It is frightful, messieurs. How can the women and the children draw water! Who can gossip of an evening, under that shadow! Under it, have I said? When I left the village, Monday evening as the sun was going to bed, and looked back from the hill, the shadow struck across the church, across the mill, across the prison - seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to where the sky rests upon it! (TTC, Bk. II, Ch. XV)

The gallows has come out of the under-world of crime in Oliver and the frenzied lawlessness in Barnaby to darken the entire domestic and social prospect and to sweep the board of life.

The Bastille and the gallows are the instruments of cruelty and death in the hands of the aristocracy, and La Force, the Conciergerie and the guillotine are the reply of democracy rising from 'the living sea' of Saint Antoine:

> 'Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind.' (TTC, Bk. III, Ch. XV)

But this stern sense of justice, which is obviously Carlylean, is relieved by a note of optimism which is naturally Dickensian:

> '..... I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.' (Ibid.)

In Great Expectations the prison once again lies in vicinity to crime, although only in suggestive vagueness. It is first seen through a child's eyes, so very appropriately, in a setting of mist and marsh.

Lurking ever in the background, it gives the story a mysterious mood.

A dreadful figure in fetters hobbling in a churchyard, a gibbet 'with some chains hanging to it which had once held a pirate,' and "Hulks" which "are prison-ships, right 'cross th' meshes" and in which people are put "because they murder and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad" - all this is stamped on Pip's young sensibility in the opening chapters of the book, and it is here that his 'expectations' are indissolubly linked with one whose life-story is, "In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail." But perhaps the whole point lies in the fact that this connexion between gentility and criminality has been kept concealed, and thus Pip's nature has been allowed a free play. Otherwise his selfish behaviour towards Joe would not have been put to a real test, and his sense of moral confinement would have been non-existent. In his contacts with Jaggers in an atmosphere of the court of trial and Newgate, the prison idea continually lurks in the background, gradually looms over the scene, and eventually overcomes the stage. Pip is shocked to know that "a brought-up London gentleman" as he is, Magwitch 'Convict', 'Prisoner, Felon, Bondman', is his 'owner' and at his mercy:

> 'Nothing was needed but this; the wretched man, after loading me with his wretched gold and silver chains for years, had risked his life to come to me, and I held it there in my keeping.' (GE, Ch. XXXIX)

And this taint of the prison not only plagues Pip's aspirations as a gentleman; it also marks a stigma on his hopes as a lover - Estella is his hateful benefactor's daughter!

Miss Havisham,[1] who out of revenge administers emotional torture to youth, owes her bridal prison to Compeyson, Magwitch's colleague and adversary who kills her would-be husband Arthur. Thus it is the "Hulks" which enact the emotional waste in, and through, Miss Havisham.

Just as through William Dorrit, Dickens had exposed the humbug of recovering gentility, exactly so through Pip he exploded the sham of aspiring gentility. But the two studies are conducted along widely different lines. The problem of Dorrit is primarily psychological, while that of Pip mainly moral. Pip sinks in his own esteem when in his career of a gentleman he happens to have chosen Magwitch as against Joe:

> 'But, sharpest and deepest pain of all - it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe.' (GE, Ch. XXXIX)

This sounds like affection or sincerity, but it is neither. It is only shamefaced selfishness seeking to hide itself. The truth is that Pip <u>will desert</u> Joe,[2] but, of course, not for a man like Magwitch.

Nevertheless, Pip is capable of honourable behaviour - he does not desert Magwitch. But perhaps even in this he is inspired by the

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1. She seems to be a variation of Mrs. Clennam, and perhaps they were both inspired in some slight measure by the Rosicrucian 'Lady' in <u>Roderick Random</u> whose footman Roderick becomes and who is a recluse with 'whimsical desires' and 'odd notions' and lives in an apartment 'at some distance from the other inhabited parts of the house.' Possibly Little Dorrit and Estella were also based on Narcissa.
2. 'It was not because I was faithful, but because Joe was faithful, that I never ran away and went for a soldier or a sailor.' - (GE, Ch.XIV)

disarming devotion of the convict himself. On his own account he would most probably be a foppish genteel creature. The disgust and uneasiness of his mind, while he shelters his patron, are only to be set against the calm and satisfaction which are Magwitch's when he views the "gentleman" he has continued to idealize in the midst of crime and suffering. And Dickens naively administers poetic justice: Magwitch dies in the pleasure of fulfilment, while Pip lives in the pain of frustration. Thus from the "Hulks" and the gibbet, from Newgate and Botany Bay "a mere warmint", a "hunted dunghill dog" rises to "make a gentleman" of a miserable orphan, because he once "kep life" in him. A lost soul reclaims itself through a child's favour, which was obviously done in fear rather than in good faith. It is too tremendous a recovery in view of the weak prop on which it rests, but Dickens means to show that human nature is fully capable of it and of more - it can even stare respectability out of countenance and give it faith, and against its wishes too! The criminal's position, taken in Nancy in Oliver, is pressed here to full advantage and made to triumph over the gentleman's. In Dorrit the facade of gentility collapses owing to its own inner fissures, but in Great Expectations the edifice is shaken owing to its alien foundations.

The general and abstract tone of the title gives the novel a widely suggestive character, so that it becomes not only a severe judgment on the Victorian craze for respectability but also a moving presentation of the human soul struggling for its regeneration.[1]

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1. It is perhaps worth noting that hypocritical sneaking villains like "Muster" Gashford and Uriah Heep - who are of the type of Thwackum and Blifil in Tom Jones - never find such sympathetic treatment at Dickens's hands.

Perhaps Dickens's handling of the prison theme can now be summed up in the light of his predecessors' treatment of it. As may be clear from the survey made earlier, the prison had appeared in their work in almost all its important aspects - as a place of confinement, as a cause of misery, and as a mode of allegory. It had thus touched upon the domestic and social spheres and borne social, political, or religious significance. Even though somewhat subdued, a note of reform had also been struck. Nevertheless, the prison did not stand out in any writer's work as it did in Dickens's.

Newgate, the Fleet, the King's Bench, the Marshalsea, and the "Hulks" and the workhouse, the public school, the warehouse, the trading firm, and Chancery - This was how the Victorian scene unfolded itself before Dickens. Crime and vice and poverty, misery and debt, greed and speculation, and hypocrisy and pride and vanity - These were the factors which determined the Victorian situation. Part by part the whole pageant came under his attention till he saw that it could be assembled in a single pattern, which he imaginatively decided should be symbolic and, above all, of the prison. As has been shown above, between the Sketches and Copperfield the prison idea persisted under one name or another, depicting this or that shade of feeling, and illuminating phase after phase of experience, so that after Bleak House it was capable of being used for the highest ends of art.

In Dorrit Dickens perhaps achieved, 'through the inclusiveness and symbolic effect of his characters,'[1] that amplitude which Tillyard

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1. E.W.M. Tillyard: The Epic Strain in the English Novel, (1958), pp. 117-9.

denies to Thackeray at his best. Dickens's great contemporary does not appear to make much of the symbolic method and practically nothing of the prison idea. Barry Lyndon treats of crime, but only as a parody of the 'Newgate' novel and obviously in view of Jonathan Wild the Great. In Vanity Fair Rawdon Crawley is involved in a short detention due to debt, but this is only a preparation for the melodramatic scene that immediately follows between him and Rebecca and Lord Steyne. In Henry Esmond Thackeray shows Henry in prison after the duel between Lord Castlewood and Lord Mohun. But except for the fact that Lady Castlewood's estrangement from him first finds expression there, the place does not signify anything. Again, in The Virginians Harry Warrington's dissipation in London leads to his detention, but he soon recovers his freedom as well as his elder twin-brother George. Thus in Thackeray imprisonment for debt does not go beyond a sponging-house.

In fact, if Thackeray's historical method aiming at continuity and oneness can admit at all of any one all-inclusive image, it is of a fair - Vanity Fair - or of a big puppet-show.

Charlotte Bronte's temperament would perhaps have better admitted of a symbolic method. But she is far too much herself. Even Shirley with its wider setting of industrial unrest could not call forth that extensive sympathy which is both individual and collective with Dickens. Nevertheless, in her descriptive power, especially in Jane Eyre, she seems to be akin to him. For instance, Jane's "imprisonment"

in the Red Room tends to bear a suggestive aspect. She is at Thornfield Hall after the project of her marriage with Rochester has fallen through:

> 'That night I never thought to sleep; but a slumber fell on me as soon as I lay down in bed. I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood. I dreamt I lay in the red room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears.' (JE, Ch. XXVII)

She receives the telepathic call:

> 'I recalled the voice I had heard; again I questioned whence it came, as vainly as before; it seemed in me - not in the external world. I asked was it a mere nervous impression - a delusion? I could not conceive or believe: it was more like an inspiration. The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's prison; it has opened the doors of the soul's cell and loosed its bands.' (JE, Ch. XXXVI)

Jane Eyre is caught here at low tide as well as high, but in each case it is the prison image that does the job.

But a source of influence appears to lie among Dickens's predecessors. In his treatment of the King's Bench Prison in Copperfield and the Marshalsea in Dorrit he most probably owes a debt to Smollett.

David is at the prison gate to see Mr. Micawber:

> "All this I did; and when at last I did see a turnkey (poor little fellow that I was!), and thought how, when Roderick Random was in a debtors' prison, there was a man there with nothing on him but an old rug, the turnkey swam before my dimmed eyes and my beating heart." (DC, Ch. XI)

So it was through Smollett that, as a child of twelve, Dickens saw fiction turning into fact when he visited his father in the Marshalsea.

Perhaps something of Melopoyn 'the poet' - the creative artist - went to make Daniel Doyce who represented a protest against government offices discouraging inventors.[1] However, such instances cannot at

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1. John Butt, 'The Topicality of Little Dorrit', University of Toronto Quarterly, October, 1959, p. 7.

all account for the emergence in the English novel of the mid-nineteenth century of a singular phenomenon like Dickens's symbolism. His genius and his sense of art were alone responsible for it.

The prison is perhaps the most elaborate and overwhelming of Dickensian symbols. Owing to the colour that had gathered around it of old, it had all the flexibility and immenseness of an elemental symbol like the fog, but it also possessed the point and thrust of a problem of topical interest - there was the Marshalsea here as against Chancery in Bleak House. Thus with its remoteness of conception and immediacy of appeal it could best integrate a vast range of experience into a single view of life and make mid-Victorian activity of a piece with the eternal flux -

> 'They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and in shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar.' (LD, Bk. II, Ch. XXXIV)

Hence, as he captured the spirit of his times in the prison image, he increased its interpretative and suggestive possibilities yet further. But, in fact, he only realized what he had visualized some twenty years before in a Dutch clock and a bird-cage in the Fleet - "veels vithin veels, a prison in a prison". And perhaps it is just the truth to say that the prison image can best define Dickens's life, his work, and his age.

C O N C L U S I O N

1

Taking up the thread of discussion from the Introduction, it can perhaps be said that the cross-sectional curves, which this study set out to draw over Dickens's work, primarily in view of his symbolism, have now been traced, if not exhaustively, at least representatively. Perhaps the Illustration gives the weight of evidence to the earlier thesis that Dickens's symbolism is a gradual process of development, that it grows where his abnormal animal sensibility and his rare sense of comparison meet, and that description forms its best repository. It may be equally clear that its growth is marked by three stages - the embryonic stage, beginning with the Sketches and ending with Barnaby; the transitional stage, extending from the Notes to the Pictures, i.e., covering Chuzzlewit and the Christmas tales; and the mature stage, stretching from Dombey to Drood. Thus, to take only two major instances, The Mudfog Papers has strong ancestral claims on Bleak House for the 'mudfog' image and on Hard Times for the Fact versus Fancy idea, and the Curiosity Shop, on Hard Times and Our Mutual Friend for the fire image. And, of course, the Notes and the Pictures stand out in full importance every time the embryonic phase is connected with the mature, and every time the transitional ground is trodden. Viewed in this light, Dickens's entire output as a writer acquires a closer unity than it would otherwise suggest.

As remarked in the Introduction and established in the Illustration, from Dombey onwards Dickens increasingly realizes his artistic effects through symbolic methods, well knowing what he is doing. This

consciousness is most reflected in his use of intentional repetition, and that in two ways - intensively, i.e., in a particular piece of description, as in the railway-journey passages in Dombey, or in the 'mudfog' opening of Bleak House, and extensively, i.e., introduced at certain strategic points in the entire span of a book, as in the description of the rain and the waves in Dombey, or of the river in Dorrit.[1]

2

One factor appears to be particularly important in the development of Dickens's sense of symbolism, and that is Carlyle's influence. Smollett in respect of the picaresque manner of much of the early work, even up to Copperfield, Scott in the matter of Barnaby, and Wordsworth in the treatment of childhood and in the depiction of town and the country, did not influence Dickens's art so thoroughly and deeply, as did Carlyle with his dramatic and deductive sense of history and his general moral, social and political pronouncements. It has already

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1. Besides giving an over-all imaginative unity to a novel and discharging the artistic functions assigned to it, as discussed throughout, most probably such 'extensive' repetition was also expected to connect the various monthly or weekly parts in the reader's mind. In other words, Dickens tried to meet the limitations of serial publication by recourse to recurring descriptive touches involving places as well as persons. An extreme case, because of the three names for the villain Blandois, is in Dorrit:

   'His moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.'

   Its function is the same as that of a 'Wellerian' or 'Jinglian' locution.

been seen[1] how Sartor Resartus stimulated Dickens's creative imagination at the Sketches stage, and the repeated references to Carlyle in the Illustration clearly imply that the novelist approached the 'Sage of Chelsea' for reasons of thought as well as of art. The earlier contention - in the Introduction - that Dickens's sense of power as a highly popular writer and his possession of purpose as a champion of the poor impelled him more and more to work for effect, fundamentally bears upon his mental and moral reaction to the contemporary scene. But this reaction cannot be determined except in the context of Carlyle's 'philosophy', and that can perhaps be stated thus in essence:

> Man is here to testify that his little Earthly Life lies between two Eternities, that its riches and possessions and good and evil hap are not intrinsically a reality at all but a shadow of realities eternal, infinite; but that it has Duties that are great, and go up to Heaven and down to Hell. He is to prove that Work is Worship, and that God's fair Earth and Task-garden would require work of all men, for whoever is not working must be begging or stealing ..... A Greatest Nobleness Principle and not a Greatest Happiness Principle should form the basis of Human Duties. Statistics and "Victorious Analysis" and "Dismal Science" cannot confine life within theories of conduct, because this Universe is not wholly a Shop, and "Soul" is not "Stomach". Nor is Cash Payment the sole nexus between man and man ..... Mammonism and Dilettantism have driven the labour to destitution. Charity and Philanthropy are completely ineffectual and even ridiculous and painful, for, with their blessings, criminals fare far better than honest workmen. Such rot cannot be stemmed even through "Painless Extinction"; it will spread from the lowest to the very highest. Social Explosions are already afoot, and dire punishments will follow in their wake. Society shivers on the brink of Abyss..... The only solution is that God's Laws should operate in Man's Life, so that he no more remains only a building beaver or a

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1. See Appendix A, p. 430.

> spinning Arachne but lives in sight of a real Heaven and Hell, his little existence rounded with an immense Eternity ..... Parliaments are no good; nor are Reform Acts and Poor Laws any use. Democracy means the rule of majority, but that does not mean the rule of Wisdom, for the Wise are few and the Foolish many. A Hero-King alone can destroy this realm of Sham and Cant, and make Reality reign instead. This is the truth History reveals, and the truths of History alone are good and sound.

A general idea of Dickens's life and work would show that, except for two things, the above view of life should be almost his own. First, Carlyle's rejection of democracy and its natural corollary, his acceptance of the dictator-hero, hardly appealed to Dickens as an ultimate goal.[1] He was certainly despaired of Parliament as an instrument of reform, but his faith in the common man was never shaken.[2] Secondly, he did not share in Carlyle's puritanic austerity. Life was indeed profound and mysterious, as Carlyle represented it, but he would not have it as a stern duty done in constant awe of a grim Deity. Nor would he deem it an entirely gloomy affair, for there was in it much promise of personal happiness and some hope of social well-being. Nevertheless, Dickens's diagnosis of the ills of the day was, in general, identical with Carlyle's. In the Chimes he took statisticians and

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1. Dickens's references to the Duke of Wellington and Napoleon Bonaparte in The Mudfog Papers and to Alexander the Great in Our Mutual Friend are significant enough, and his sympathetic presentation of Cromwell in A Child's History of England is motivated by a sense of patriotism rather than a love of heroism.
2. The Speeches of Charles Dickens, (Oxford, 1960), ed. K.J. Fielding, p. 407: 'My faith in the people governing, is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in The People governed, is, on the whole, illimitable.'

political economists to task in the spirit of Chartism and Past and Present, and he wrote to Forster again and again from Italy that Carlyle was an 'indispensable' member of the 'little circle' he would like him to 'get up' to hear the tale. And in Hard Times he wove a pattern of 'wonder', probably based on an outline in Sartor,[1] both being set against the vogue of 'Facts and Figures' and 'Mensuration and Numeration', and he sought Carlyle's permission to inscribe it to his name, because

> 'I know it contains nothing in which you do not think with me, for no man knows your books better than I.'[2]

Such intimate and distinctive knowledge of Carlyle's books suggests an intellectual interest of a very high order, for even those to whom Dickens means all instinct and no thought, cannot deny Carlyle a great intellectual quality. So Dickens could not only think but think with Carlyle. And this was no common agreement; it was an agreement between two creative artists in their view of the human predicament as it then obtained.

Perhaps Carlyle's influence on Dickens can be adequately represented even by leaving out the other books - The French Revolution

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1. Philipp Aronstein, 'Dickens und Carlyle', Anglia, XVIII, (1896). In a footnote Aronstein connects the following passage in Sartor with Hard Times: " 'Wonder,' says he, 'is the basis of Worship: the reign of Wonder is perennial, indestructible in Man; only at certain stages (as the present), it is for some short season, a reign in partibus infidelium.' That progress of Science which is to destroy Wonder, and in its stead substitute Mensuration and Numeration, finds small favour with Teufelsdrockh, much as he otherwise venerates these two latter prodesses."
   Several references can be relevantly made to Hard Times, but perhaps the most important would be to Ch.VIII of Bk.I which is entitled 'Never Wonder' and opens with the sentence-paragraph:
   'Let us strike the key-note again, before pursuing the tune.'
2. Letters, II, 567.

among them - and limiting the discussion to Sartor, for, as Louis Cazamian says,

> 'With Sartor Resartus the doctrine of Carlyle has taken its definitive shape, all its elements are there and Carlyle is already aware of their organic unity. None in fact of the great directive ideas of his later books is absent from this.'
>
> 'In it there is a metaphysic, an ethic, and a theory of social relations .....'[1]

Thus Dickens's early recourse to Sartor is a fact of very great importance, especially in the context of his symbolism, because not only was Carlyle's whole teaching telescoped into it, it was also a remarkable, well-populated symbol-gallery in itself. Furthermore, it contained an exposition of the theory of symbolism. Fantasy, Imagination and Metaphor came up for discussion, and there was in it - in Book III - Chapter III entitled 'SYMBOLS'. To have known such a book as Dickens alone could know Carlyle's books, and to have reacted creatively to it, as he did with 'Meditations in Monmouth-street' in the Sketches and with the theme of wonder in Hard Times, should perhaps establish the fact that he was fully conscious of the symbolic ends he was achieving in his work.

The reviewer in Fraser's calls Carlyle's style 'Carlylese' and even naively parodies it, and, according to A.W. Ward, much of the 'angry rhetoric' and declamatory element in Dickens 'must be ascribed' to his reading of Carlyle.[2] But surely 'Carlylese' was unique for its vivid imagery, persistent personification and poetic ambiguity; and it can

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1. Louis Cazamian, (1924) Carlyle (New York, 1932), Ch. V, pp. 128 and 104.
2. A.W. Ward, Dickens, Ch. VII, p. 202.

be held that whatever impetus Dickens's symbolism received from without, a major part of it must be ascribed to Carlyle. Hence, one can emphatically urge that besides largely helping Dickens in sorting out his sympathies and antipathies on the social and political plane, Carlyle encouraged the 'poetic dramatist' in him, both by precept and example, to advance along the symbolic line. The instances of the dust, Deluge, fog, and gig images, and of the idea of Spontaneous Combustion are clearly relevant here.

3

Perhaps no other English novelist - and this in full view of the contemporary literary scene, showing Disraeli's Sybil, or The Two Nations, Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton and North and South and Charlotte Bronte's Shirley - had such an intense sense of the present as Dickens had, and it was so in spite of the fact that, in general, he was highly critical of its sins of omission and commission. The past hardly ever appealed to him.[1] In fact, he looked upon it as a long stretch of cruelty, oppression and persecution. It may be recalled here how he felt 'exalted with the proud delight of living in these degenerate times' when a silent streak of heavenly light exposed to his view the subterranean vaults of torture at Avignon in France. His attitude to the past is more directly expressed in a letter to Miss Burdett-Coutts. He is speaking

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1. Probably this was for personal reasons too. Looking back upon his own past, he could not find any consolation. It always remained a memory of starvation, drudgery and humiliation.

about his son "Charley":

> "I have some idea of writing him a child's History of England, to the end that he may have tender-hearted notions of War and Murder, and may not fix his affections on wrong heroes, or see the bright side of Glory's sword and know nothing of the rusty one ....."[1]

Dickens accepts the fact of heroism - even the need of it for a child - but his standards of heroism are much more exacting than Carlyle's. In fact he is a greater idealist.

Again, the red-faced gentleman's talk of 'the good old times' in the Chimes is an earlier instance of Dickens's disgust for the past:

> "The good old times, the good old times ..... What times they were! They were the only times. It's of no use talking about any other times, or discussing what the people are in these times. You don't call these, times, do you? I don't ....."

Through this elegy on the 'deceased Millenium', Dickens suggests that in reality it is a sort of camouflage prepared by the oppressors to hide the existing realities from the oppressed. Twice only, once in Barnaby and then in the Tale, did he look back upon the past, but that was only the immediate past, and even that he depicted in terms of the social and political conditions of his own day.[2] First, religious intolerance and persecution, and then aristocratic exploitation and oppression were brought to bear upon the industrial unrest and social injustice of the eighteen-forties. Perhaps Dickens's reading of the situation was exaggerated, but there were genuine grounds of alarm. He would not take risks, because he did not want the chaos and terror

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1. Letters, I, 532.
2. The key-words in the opening paragraph of the Tale are:
'in short the period was so far like the present period .....'

of the French Revolution to grip his country in any form or to any degree. He pointed to the bloody writing on the wall of the past to warn against what might happen, not to suggest what should happen. For he believed in social justice and well-being coming through a change of heart rather than through a violent class strife.

Dickens's extraordinary sense of the present was as much sharpened by his vocation of a journalist as it was nourished by his extremely practical and energetic nature. Starting as a reporter for The Mirror of Parliament and the True Sun in 1832, in time he became associated with the Morning Chronicle, Bentley's Miscellany, the Daily News, Household Words and All the Year Round. This means that he entered the field of journalism before he called himself 'Boz' and left it only when he left life. Again, his interest and responsibility in it progressively increased: he was the editor and major share-holder of All the Year Round. Thus in his duties as a journalist he had to feel attentively the pulse of life as it beat from day to day in his fellow-men, in the towns and the suburbs, and even beyond the native shores. With the topical and the transient looming so large on his mental landscape, his sharp sensibility and vivid imagination were bound to refer them to the creative artist in him. How to introduce the dust-heap, the railway vogue, Chancery, or the Marshalsea into a literary work of lasting pleasure? That appears to be Dickens's real problem, and, stated in fundamental terms, it becomes: how can the particular live in the general? The position of the novelist here is perhaps the

same as that of the poet in The Poetic Image: 'how far can the poet successfully make use of objects like aeroplanes and engines in metaphor?'[1] C. Day Lewis answers the question by suggesting that 'poems which are not mere description of an engine or an airliner', 'which attempt through these objects to focus certain states of mind', and 'which use the objects metaphorically' will live even though the engines and aeroplanes become obsolete, and whether or no they have been assimilated by the general consciousness is irrelevant to the matter.

Dickens the 'poetic dramatist' adopts exactly the method outlined above. With his vast reading public before him, he, in the main, chooses to admit into his work only such topicalities as have been assimilated by the general consciousness, and through them he so focusses the individual and collective states of mind in Victorian England that the very mainspring of human motive and behaviour stands exposed to view. For instance, he does not merely equate dust with money, or steam locomotion with death, but he defines the whole industrial activity and acquisitive culture of his time in their terms. And he goes yet further. He shows Rick courting ruin and death at Chancery in full knowledge of the fatal dangers and against the stern and timely warnings of friends. Again, he shows William Dorrit taking sustained and studied pains in the Marshalsea to confine himself in a yet narrower court of vanity, even though he is fully conscious of its false basis. This makes the bars of the prison cut deeper into his mind,

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1. C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, (London, 1947), pp. 89-90.

so that he goes straight to his doom in spite of his freedom and prosperity. Dickens has discovered here the innermost secret of human tragedy. Man lives in a paradox:

> 'He cannot flee from dread, for he loves it; really he does not love it, for he flees from it.'[1]

That is how Dickens's Danish contemporary Kierkegaard saw truth in his 'simple psychological deliberation' on original sin.

Thus the motive force behind a topical symbol in Dickens springs from the roots of human nature. But his abnormal animal sensibility and rare sense of comparison would not leave it only at that abstract level: it must find expression in resemblances in the physical world. For instance, the wish to perpetuate the flourishing House of Dombey through a son - in disregard of a daughter's affection - is hideous and wasteful, and hence it is to be couched in terms of the new railway vogue, and to be symbolized by the monstrous steam locomotive, and the scene is also to record the rush of the resistless river, and the atmosphere is to reverberate with the voices in the waves. Because thus alone can 'the old, old fashion - Death' be shown to reign supreme.

Similarly, it is not enough that Chancery should epitomize the universal blinding craze for filthy lucre; it must be given a 'mudfog' setting, with superlative shares of the same reserved for its own approaches.

Such treatment ensures a perfect unity between the abstract and the concrete, the tremendous and the trivial. The 'ghost' of nature

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1. Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, (London, 1944), p. 40.

communicates with the 'ghost' of man, and the eternal mystery glimmers through the physical manifestation, and although each may well justify itself in its own place, both live in mutual sanction. Naturally, the aesthetic pleasure, which this harmony imparts, travels far beyond the present into the realms of the immortal. In fact, such a result is implicit in the very idea of a symbol, because, as Coleridge says, it is

> 'characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representation.'[1]

Dickens's strong passion for the 'gross' and his keen sense of relations in things were specially suited for that 'crystallization' which Middleton Murry reserves for the 'greater poet', and in the process of which an object or incident in the physical world stirs such vivid and deep emotion in him that it becomes perfectly symbolic of all the emotion latent in him. As Baudelaire says,

> 'In certain states of the soul, the profound significance of life is revealed completely in the spectacle, however commonplace, that is before one's eyes: it becomes the symbol of this significance.'[2]

The human 'spectacle', as it was before Dickens's eyes, and as it threw his soul into 'certain states', was best reflected in the railway fever, the dust-heap assets, the lot of fallen women, Chancery suits, the Marshalsea shadow, red tapism, the speculation and 'Shares' craze,

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1. S.T. Coleridge, The Statesman's Manual. (1953), ed. R.J. White, p. 25. See Political Tracts of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley,
2. John Middleton Murry, The Problem of Style, (Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 27-8.

and the like. These topicalities shaped his creative response into symbols like dust, mud, fog, the railway train, and the prison, and the latent storm of his emotion being thus touched off, he embarked upon a relentless war against mammonism, utilitarianism and monotony, in the name of social equity, human feeling and imaginative truth.

It is perhaps worth noting that the local and the ephemeral are continually made to merge in the universal and the perennial by recourse to the primordial note which 'dust', 'mud', 'fog', 'river', 'sea', 'journey', and 'prison', all strike. Conceivably for the same reason, the image of the railway train in Dombey is connected with 'the old, old fashion - Death'. Moreover, it is hemmed in on all sides by the elemental river and sea imagery with its profound connotations of life and death. As Jung says, it is the primordial image which expresses 'the unique and unconditioned creative power of the mind', and which is 'a recapitulatory expression of the living process.'[1] Hence, what really gives Dickens's work a lasting charm is his deep sense of the human situation, so that the topicalities are only the terms of its crystallization, and the particular lives in the general as a natural, physical illustration of the mysterious eternal flux.

Dickens's intense sense of the present appears to flow from his abnormal animal sensibility - a craving for all that is immediate to the senses. But, as emphasized in the Introduction, it co-exists with a rare insight into relations in things - a thoroughly abstract activity. Thus his representation of sensuous reality cannot but be

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1. C.G. Jung, Psychological Reflections, (London, 1953), p. 38.

spiritual, i.e., his descriptions needs must be symbolic. And that is what this study has been attempting to show throughout.

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Dickens's triumph in the matter of description is perhaps unique. As suggested in the Introduction, none of his predecessors achieved through it what he did, nor, for that matter, any of his contemporaries or successors. Disraeli was fully conscious of the Condition of England question, and the scenes of social misery in the industrial towns and the sufferings of the toiling children and agricultural labourers in Sybil have been depicted with genuine concern, but not with Dickens's intensity of poetic feeling. Similarly lacking in over-riding connotations are the pictures of imposing mansions and of the magnificence of their luxurious chambers in Tancred. Even the desert landscape of Palestine, with its biblical associations, and Sinai, as the scene of a spiritual experience, fail to assume a compelling, ambiguous aspect.

As Charlotte Bronte remarked in her preface to the 1847 edition of Jane Eyre, Thackeray's nature was unlike Fielding's:

> 'They say he is like Fielding ..... He resembles Fielding as an eagle does a vulture: Fielding could stoop on carrion, but Thackeray never does.'

This 'carrion' is only a strong word for a craving for the gross which in its non-carnal form is gratified in description and which Fielding brings in to relieve and refresh the reader's mind. Thackeray rarely went beyond this position; often enough he did not go even as far. And perhaps the over-all difference between him and Dickens can be best realized in terms of description. For instance, Thackeray's picture of 'Pleasant Rhine gardens! Fair scenes of peace and sunshine' in Vanity Fair - Chapter LXII - does glitter, and is charged with reminiscence, but it hardly lives the intense vivid life of a similar representation of the physical in, say, Copperfield. However, Gaunt House in Chapter XLVII not only has an animistic touch, but bears a significance too. That means that it is done in Dickens's manner - the name, the house and the inmates, all breathe of 'gauntness'. Thackeray remarked of Dickens's execution of the scene of Paul's funeral in Dombey: 'I think he has been reading a certain yellow-coloured book and with advantage too.'[1] Most probably 'a certain green-coloured book' was involved in the depiction of Gaunt House.

Dickens's influence in the matter of description can be seen to travel into the life of the English novel till the present day, and this, above all, in making the 'ghost' of nature consort with the 'ghost' of man, or - to employ an earlier cliche - in the use of the 'pathetic fallacy' which to an insight greater than Ruskin's is not a mere device used by the Romantic poets. For, says C. Day Lewis,

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1. Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, (1954), p. 52, fn. 1.

> "The extension of sympathy outwards into the natural world and deeper into man's mind brought new revelation of the complexities between man and nature, a general enriching of the pattern in which both figure. The 'pathetic fallacy' is, after all, no more and no less than a poetic way of uttering the belief that 'everything that lives is holy'. Personification so dear to the Augustans, is a cousin germane of the pathetic fallacy: the latter gives life to the inanimate life or sympathy to the brute creation, the former gives breath to the abstract." [1]

Thus, when Meredith makes landscape share in the human emotion, he may as well be betraying a Dickensian influence as exercising his highly poetic sensibility. Virginia Woolf notes how, in Harry Richmond especially, the sea or the sky or the wood is brought forward to symbolize what the human beings are feeling or looking.'[2]

Again, the highly operative character of the descriptive wealth of the Wessex novels perhaps derives as much inspiration from the Dickensian example as from the French naturalistic precept, the scientific flavour contracted through the latter only jarring upon the aesthetic sense at times. One wonders what Charlotte Bronte would have thought of such a great lover of 'carrion' as Hardy. The charming idyllic pictures in Under the Greenwood Tree, the dark, sombre downland in Far from the Madding Crowd, the all-pervasive Egdon Heath in The Return of the Native and The Mayor of Casterbridge, and the country farm in Tess are clearly illustrative of Hardy's strong sense of the physical world, and his highly sensual nature.

And D.H. Lawrence was a yet greater lover of 'carrion': he has been described as a victim of sexual morbidity. His passion for the

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1. C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, (London, 1947), p. 62.
2. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, Second Series, (London, 1932), p.231.

gross strikes the primitive note in a provoking contravention of the conventional inhibitions. Taking the position at its extreme, one might say, in Lady Chatterly's Lover he shocked social morality, and in The Man Who Died he shocked religious orthodoxy only to celebrate his almost paganish cult of the body in each case. Often enough he emphasizes the symbolic meaning through a rich and sensuous depiction of nature. Perhaps Sons and Lovers representing a miner's vision of the physical world, and The Plumed Serpent standing for a heathen's view of the spiritual, depend to a considerable extent upon description.

Dickens's distinction in the field of description was known to the critic of his own day, but it does not seem to have been established in dignity. However, as quoted from Forster in the Introduction,[1] Dickens stood his ground firmly, perfectly clear in his mind as to the artistic truth of his method and attitude, and before long it began to attract both sanction and admiration from criticism. In 1882 A.W. Ward is found saying:

> 'The whole art of descriptive reporting ..... was, if not actually set on foot, at any rate reinvigorated and vitalized by him.'
>
> 'In everything, whether animate or inanimate, he found out at once the characteristic feature, and reproduced it in words of faultless precision. This is the real secret of his descriptive power ..... Scenery, for its own sake, he rarely cared to describe; but no one better understood how to reproduce the combined effect of scenery and weather on the predisposed mind.'[2]

Swinburne touches upon the same point when he says that the part played by the Thames 'in more than a few of his books is indivisible

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1. See pp. 38 and 78 above.
2. A.W. Ward, Dickens, (1924) Ch. VII, pp. 221-3.

from the parts played by human actors beside it or upon it'.[1]

Oliver Elton remarks that Dickens's ever-active observing faculty sometimes gives human moods and characteristics to pieces of furniture and kitchen utensils and sometimes divests persons of their human garb to treat them as things or odd animals. By virtue of this 'pathetic fallacy' and its inversion, Elton believes, Dickens has 'vastly enlarged the scope of description in the English novel'.[2]

Sir Osbert Sitwell points out how admirably Dickens exploits natural phenomena for creating atmosphere, and how he makes fog and mist and rain[3] participate in the action, thus enhancing its dramatic effect.

F.R. Leavis's recognition of Dickens's triumph in the field of fictional prose - discussed in the Introduction - appears to have attracted very serious attention of the critics. Julian Symons asks what is 'the indestructible residue in Dickens's art that holds us attentive, and makes us pull through much that in any other author would impel instant rejection', and then replies:

> 'He offers ..... an unparalleled visual sense, a capacity which never fails in setting down memorably the features of a human being, a house or a landscape .....'
>
> 'Dickens was quiveringly sensitive to <u>every</u> facet of external reality. It is safe to say that every chapter of every one of his books contains some description in which a heightened reality is achieved through a heightened sensibility.'

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1. A.C. Swinburne, <u>Charles Dickens</u>, (1913), p. 20.
2. Oliver Elton, <u>Dickens and Thackeray</u>, (1924), pp. 13 and 17.
3. Osbert Sitwell, <u>Dickens</u>, (1932), pp. 17–20.
   Sir Osbert's observations are important in that he suggests the lines along which Dickens's work can be set in relation to Dostoevsky's, Flaubert's, and Proust's.

'Dickens's characteristic method of achieving the intensity which many have praised and few analysed is, then, the accumulation of detail. Phrase is added to phrase to build up a personality with, very often, one key phrase that brings the figure startlingly before us ..... The figure thus created is placed in its appropriate setting, and then acts in accordance with the suggestions offered by its appearance and habitat .....'

'We cannot afford to skip a line or a phrase of these descriptions if we wish fully to apprehend the skill of Dickens's characterization.'[1]

George Santayana in 1921, skipping 'What the waves were always saying,' has indeed been left on the other pole!

Before quoting passage after passage from Oliver, Nickleby, the Curiosity Shop, Copperfield, Bleak House, and Our Mutual Friend, Mario Praz says:

'Where he is unrivalled is in his descriptions of the chaotic, picturesque, sinister London of 1820-30: this is his background, and such a background would suffice to throw a halo of fable round any story. And the London of Dickens has, in the end, imposed itself upon the imagination of posterity.'

And Praz emphasizes what Ward, Elton and Symons have already said on the point:

'Dickens invests places and aspects of landscape almost with personalities, so that they become coloured by good and evil intentions - a kind of anthropomorphism which Proust was later to derive from him.'[2]

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1. Julian Symons, Charles Dickens, (London, 1951), pp. 84, 86, and 89.
2. Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, (Oxford University Press, 1956), Part II, pp. 175 and 182.

5

Perhaps a few words about the method in Dickens's descriptions and the evaluation of its influence according to present-day standards are necessary. As suggested in the Introduction, it basically involves a generalization in terms of the dominant particular, and it is the great Dickensian secret, holding together background, scene, setting, atmosphere, character, and action as a unity of impression. And the dogmatically conscious novelist has hardly gone further in formulating the principles of his art. Emile Zola believes in an underlying relationship between human character and the external world when he defines description as 'an account of environment which determines and completes man.'[1]

Making Zola's view a little more definite and a little more vital, one would perhaps get Dickens's

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1. Emile Zola, Le Roman Experimental, II.

position - man and nature meeting in vivid intensity in the interests of artistic unity. And this could well be a junction of a score of theories, and, in fact, there are findings of serious import already. Jacob Isaacs shows that while the phrase, 'the stream of consciousness', came Virginia Woolf's way probably in William James's Principles of Psychology, her 'impressionistic' method she found in Dickens's Nickleby:

> ' "Thought Mrs. Nickleby in a parenthesis." Here in a flash is the whole of Virginia Woolf's parenthetic method ...'[1]

And, according to Dame Una Pope-Hennessy, 'Flora Finching's idiosyncratic speech in Dorrit' also anticipates 'the stream of consciousness' technique.[2]

As for James Joyce, Jacob Isaacs likes to suggest that he did not get his "expressionistic" method - as he himself said - from Edouard Dujardin but from 'Charles Dickens who is a master of montage and a master of texture', so that Leopold Bloom in Ulysses descends from Mr. Jingle in Pickwick, Mrs. Nickleby in Nickleby, and Mrs. Lirriper in Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings. Furthermore, Julian Symons finds similarities between the surrealists and Dickens:

> 'Dickens employs the method of surrealist painting, by describing the fantastic shapes and figures that occupy his mind in the soberest tones of naturalism: but there is an important difference between his attitude and that of the surrealists. Dickens worked without self-consciousness, in the belief that he was using the real colours of everyday life; the surrealists are highly self-conscious artists, well aware of their own quaintness and queerness. The strangeness of Dickens is natural; that of the surrealists, is, however ingeniously, contrived.'[3]

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1. Jacob Isaacs, An Assessment of Twentieth-Century Literature, (London 1951), pp. 98-9.
2. Randolph Quirk, 'Some Observations on the Language of Dickens', A Review of English Literature, July 1961, p. 25.
3. Julian Symons, Charles Dickens, (London, 1951), p. 87.

Again, in addition to the frequent suggestions of comparison between Dickens and Dostoevsky in the matter of hardships in their early life, and of the affinities between them in the treatment of crime and punishment, there are definite hints of resemblances between Dickens's work and Kafka's. Enumerating the many-layered ambiguity of the Austrian novelist's Trial, Jacob Isaacs remarks: 'If you hate the law and think, like Dickens, that life is a trial in a Circumlocution Court, then the book is about that.' And Julian Symons emphasizes the common ground between them in far wider terms. He has been discussing Dickens's characterization:

> 'These products of an injured child's imagination are symbols as well as characters, and they exist not in the world of literal reality, but "on the perpetually shifting frontier between ordinary life and the terror that would seem to be real" ..... [This] phrase quoted ..... from Kafka's notebooks suggests another writer whose work resembles in many ways that of Dickens. Kafka, too, obtains effects through the accumulation of detail; he is capable of the same distortion through the illusion of photographic exactness; he shows the same over-developed sensibility to external stimuli, his figures are much more important as symbols than are literal characters; like Dickens, Kafka is an insistent moralist. And the final merit of Dickens's work, like that of Kafka, is that through the distortions and the morality there is conveyed to us a social fable. The fable, in the case of Kafka, touches the whole nature of man as a social and religious animal; in the case of Dickens, it deals with man's relation to Victorian society.'[1]

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1. Julian Symons, Charles Dickens, (London, 1951), pp.90-91.

6

The last sentence above takes the matter back to Dickens's intense sense of the present. However, a question arises here: Does not his method of colouring the general with 'the predominant passion' of the particular present a falsified vision of life? The answer is an emphatic NO. For the particular, which has been chosen and given dominance, is essential to the general, and hence definitive of its reality. Thus the workhouse-relief administration, the Yorkshire schools, the Black Country misery, the London slum life, the Chancery delays, the extent of social iniquity and official callousness, the Marshalsea sufferings and red tapism may or may not be the exact truth about Victorian society, but it is undoubtedly the essential truth about it, and the important fact is that Dickens could not tell it in any other way, for living in a 'popular dark age', he believed only in a 'fanciful treatment' of reality. And perhaps herein lies the whole secret of his triumph.

As repeatedly asserted above, Dickens's method fundamentally means a generalization in terms of the dominant particular, and ultimately draws man and nature closer together in an intensely-felt imaginative sympathy. Art thus becomes a sensuous representation of life, significant and vivid, all-pervasive and universal. No other method could create fables in an age of pronounced utilitarian thinking and heightened materialistic activity, surely not fables like Dickens's which live and last. Never indeed the method of the exact truth.

A balance with the scales perfectly even is perhaps the exactest of truths, but it is also the deadest!

And then the over-all question is: Why should not the truth about Victorian society develop into the truth about human society, the truth about life? In its general lack of generosity, goodwill and fellow-feeling, in its mad craze for money, in its wanton neglect of the poor, the unemployed and the fallen, in its failure to establish social justice, in its vain and ineffectual charity, in its rich marital contracts underlined by emotional falsification, in its quest for what is known to be ruinous, in its attempts to hide its injured gentility, in its dry utilitarian philosophy and statistical tone, in its zealous pursuit of a mechanical culture plagued by monotony - in all this Victorian society was running fatal risks like any other society, like this twentieth-century society, to be sure, with the difference that the cap Dickens prepared perhaps sat a little loose on the head of his age, while it fits that of the present only too well. And, as suggested earlier, it is precisely here that the functional value of Dickens's symbols is proved, for it is through these that the modern man, anywhere on the habitable globe, can see in the particularities of a particular society, a reflection of the essentials of his own. The continued and ever-increasing popularity of Dickens's work is proof enough that its relevance and appeal are vast and timeless, and what ensures their immortality is their power to refer the reader's mind to more than one level of experience, i.e., their poetic, symbolic quality.

7

Complementary to the 'fanciful treatment', which connects Dickens's vision of Victorian life with the fable, was the high-seriousness with which he addressed himself to his vocation as an artist.[1] His care and concern for his work were as great and deep as his faith in the human values and his sense of social purpose. He truly knew the pain and pleasure that attend on the creative experience, and he sincerely put in the labour and toil that give it the form of art.[2] Sometimes, in view of his journalist's duties, or of his limitations as a serial novelist, or even of his capacity as a great public entertainer, his consciousness and self-dedication as an artist are overlooked, and he is represented as a remarkable improvisator. This is a serious error indeed, for if ever there was a writer who wanted every single word he wrote to tell, it was Dickens. His animal sensibility and his power to perceive relations in things met in consummate intensity to produce the symbolic descriptions which have been the chief concern of this study, and, as remarked earlier, the compelling beauty of Dickens's work is also best visible in these descriptions. F.R. Leavis's remarks on Hard Times may be recalled here. It is by 'a richly poetic art of the word', 'by texture, imaginative mode, symbolic method, and

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1. In his 'In Memoriam: W.M. Thackeray' in The Cornhill Magazine, February, 1864, Dickens said that Thackeray's too much feigning 'a want of earnestness' and making 'a pretence of undervaluing his art ..... was not good for the art he held in trust.'
2. The conception and execution of The Chimes is a case in point. See Forster, IV, V, 346.

the resulting concentration', by a 'command of word, phrase, rhythm and image' that Dickens shows a 'subtlety of achieved art' which even Flaubert never approached. In fact it is the immense vitality of Dickens's 'poetry' that distinguishes it from the classical heaviness of Flaubert's true successor, James Joyce's, or the metaphorical density of Henry James's, both of which at times appear to approach the figurative precision of the imagists.

Randolph Quirk goes deeper into the matter when he observes that Dickens's 'sense of the appropriate in language, his awareness that in the use of language we have an index to man's nature and experience, his explorer's interests in all communicative phenomena', are relevant 'not only to the evaluation of Dickens, but also more widely to the orientation of English linguistic studies.'[1] He also refers to Dickens's use of language in a representational fashion, some of its instances being, 'the present participles and present tenses at the opening of Bleak House, the systematic, periodic use of the historic present in Copperfield, an analogous usage in Our Mutual Friend, and the almost rhythmic alternation between present and past for narrative in Edwin Drood.' In his experimental use of language, too, Dickens tries to enhance the over-all connotative effect, and this can be seen in 'the many-layered, many faceted language economically transmuting both experience and consciousness into a whole which is rich with suggestion.'[2]

Again, it is a heightened sense of the word and its intrinsic value in terms of meaning, sound, and 'colour', that determines the nomenclature in Dickens. Persons - and even places perhaps - are not named

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1. Randolph Quirk, Charles Dickens and Appropriate Language, (Durham, 1959),
2. Randolph Quirk, 'Some Observations on the Language of Dickens', A Review of English Literature, July, 1961. [p.25

without significance. As C.A. Bodelsen says,

> 'whether the name was real or invented, his attitude to his characters made it necessary that it should be the right one of the person in question: the whole description would be wrong if the name was not right.'
>
> "One evidence of the care which Dickens devoted to the naming of his characters is the set of lists of 'Available Names' that he left behind him."[1]

This susceptibility to pure sound symbolism means that Dickens could derive sensuous gratification even from the mysterious rudiments of human expression, and that not only every word but every syllable, every letter had a suggestive function to discharge.

Thus name and language are also made to contribute to that artistic unity which background, setting, atmosphere, character and action join to create, and it is the symbolic approach which gives compositional strength to the form of a Dickens novel, in general design as well as in minute detail.

8

Dickens, then, is a writer, living intensely in the present, possessed of a healthy social idealism, and holding his art 'in trust'.

Given a 'fanciful' twist, George Moore's 'naturalistic' definition of the novel as 'contemporary history', should also be a definition of Dickens's novels, and their tremendous hold over his reading public proves their close relationship with the contemporary sensibility. But the topicalities they celebrate, he made to crystallize from human nature as its timeless symbols, so that their appeal is lasting and universal. His bond with his readers was perhaps the strongest a writer ever had,

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1. C.A. Bodelsen, 'The Physiognomy of the Name', A Review of English Literature, July, 1961.

and by employing a serial mode of publication, he contributed something to the modern age being hailed as the age of the novel.

The confidence Dickens reposed in the masses has been vindicated: the world increasingly becomes the Common Man's. Thus, whereas Macaulay sensed only a "sullen socialism" in him, T.A. Jackson's finding is Marxism. But the truth is that Dickens's view of humanity is not a "class" view, nor a "camp" view, which is only the next step. Life is not in division, and man is already lonely enough in his soul. Society needs not strife but concord - a co-operation based on common justice, general well-being, and perennial goodwill. Social wrongs must be urgently righted, or the holocaust of retribution would follow, and that would be a day of black terror for everybody, the oppressor as well as the oppressed.

Dickens's insight into the pattern of the new materialistic values has proved to be wholesome and unerring. When he pitched Fancy against Fact and declared that 'the very holding of a popular literature through a kind of popular dark age,' may depend upon a 'fanciful treatment' of reality, he anticipated not only Matthew Arnold's horror of the 'Philistines'[1] but also W.H. Auden's sense of 'The Age of Anxiety'.[2]

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1. Withdrawing 'the offending phrase' he had used for Mr. Wright's version of the Iliad, Arnold wrote in his 'Preface to Second Edition' (1869) of Essays in Criticism:

   'My vivacity is but the last sparkle of flame before we are all in the dark, the last glimpse of colour before we all go into drab, - the drab of the earnest, prosaic, practical, austerely literal future. Yes, the world will soon be the Philistines!'

   Later, in 'The Study of Poetry' (1880) he was to say:

   'The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay ..... Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it.'

2. Dickens's characters have been often described as suffering in isolation. Auden, too, builds his 'Baroque Eclogue', The Age of Anxiety, (1948), upon the sense of loneliness and failure in life.

In the matter of his symbolism Dickens is stages ahead of his contemporaries at home, and in its range and vitality he can compare favourably with Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville across the Atlantic. He has affinities with Dostoevsky and Kafka, and he has influenced Proust. The 'stream of consciousness' of the modern novel flows from him, so that Joyce got his method from him on the 'expressionistic' side, and Virginia Woolf got hers on the 'impressionistic'. Again, the surrealist finds his own methods already exemplified in his giants and dwarfs. Furthermore, for his use of the 'device of concealment', 'Dickens has as good a title as Edgar Allan Poe to be called the father of the modern detective story', and Mr. Bucket in Bleak House is 'probably the most vividly presented fictional detective before Sherlock Holmes.'[1] Incidentally, that is only an extreme in the direction of Aristotle's - and Robert Liddell's - 'pity and fear' - through - incident theory, or what Fielding would dismiss as 'a newspaper of many volumes'.

And, as this study has earlier suggested in the context of Bleak House and Little Dorrit, Dickens thinks with his Danish contemporary Kierkegaard in his concept of 'dread'. This is important, because it sets Dickens in some relation to Christian existentialism which derives its main inspiration from Kierkegaard.

But perhaps Dickens's most important triumph lies in the contribution he made to the present-day view that 'no object is inherently unpoetical'.[2] Wordsworth, who had started - in Helen Darbishire's words - the process of emancipation in respect of poetic subject, hoped that the railways

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1. Julian Symons, Charles Dickens, (London, 1951), p.78. Also see Osbert Sitwell's Dickens (1932), p. 15. Symons follows Sir Osbert here.
2. C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, (London, 1947), p. 90.

might engender a new poetic feeling of their own, but he believed they were 'at war with old poetic feeling'.[1] Dickens not only disproved Wordsworth's belief and fulfilled his hope, but from the railways he developed a poetic symbolism which, with its rich blend of the old and new images, captured the impact of the mighty change that had come upon his age, and defined the character it would give to human motive and endeavour. And he alone could do this. His intense sense of the immediate and his rare perception of relations in things revel in a union of reality and romance, and this through the railways as through any other object. He arrives in Paris from London:

> 'I walk up to the Barriere de l'Etoile, sufficiently dazed by my flight to have a pleasant doubt of the reality of everything about me; of the lively crowd, the overhanging trees, the performing dogs, the hobby-horses, the beautiful perspectives of shining lamps: the hundred and one inclosures, where the singing is, in gleaming orchestras of azure and gold, and where a star-eyed Houri comes round with a box for voluntary offerings. So, I pass to my hotel, enchanted; sup, enchanted; go to bed, enchanted; pushing back this morning (if it were really this morning) into the remoteness of time, blessing the South Eastern Company for realising the Arabian Nights in these prose days.' ('A Flight', Household Words, October 30, 1851).

The poet and the novelist could equally learn from the way the artist in Dickens met the onslaught of machinery and materialism.

To have accomplished this, and to be inevitably relevant to the later 'schools' of painting and to the new techniques of the novel, and to be distinctively referable in the context of the Continental and American masters of thought and art, is understandable. And to be the creator of crowds of living and breathing human beings that fill the panoramas of life his novels are, to give things and places a

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1. Humphry House, The Dickens World, (1942), fn. 1, pp.145-6.

vibrant and haunting personality, to wield an infinite power of humour and pathos, to be possessed of a deep sense of social purpose, to be a full and active participant in the contemporary spectacle, to be the most popular entertainer of his time, and to be one whose work has 'become part of the literary climate within which western man lives',[1] is understandable, too. But to be this as well as that is not easily understandable, unless Dickens is accepted as perhaps the greatest name in the history of the English novel, and as the only 'poetic dramatist' worthy to be placed in the neighbourhood of Shakespeare.

Theories of art will come and go, and 'schools' of thought will form and disperse. Howsoever they may try to fasten themselves upon Dickens's work, they will never stick on it except here or there, and for a while. For theories and 'schools' never yet encompassed life, singly or together, and never shall. And Dickens's work, like Shakespeare's, is as varied and immense and deep as life.

This study does not claim to have effected that 'dissociation' which, according to T.S. Eliot, remained to be performed in the case of Dickens, but it has tried to suggest that there is as strong a case as ever was for attempting such a dissociation, not only against a European or Western background, but also in a yet wider, universal context, and that this can best be done in terms of his symbolism.

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1. Walter Allen, The English Novel, (Penguin Books, 1960), p. 174.

A P P E N D I C E S

Appendix A

(p. 38, fn. 1)

Dickens

and

Bentham and Carlyle.

On 13th July, 1854, Dickens wrote to Carlyle from Boulogne:

> "I am going next month to publish in one volume a story now coming out in Household Words, called Hard Times. I have constructed it patiently, with a view to its publication altogether in a compact cheap form. It contains what I do devoutly hope will shake some people in a terrible mistake of these days, when so presented. I know it contains nothing in which you do not think with me, for no man knows your books better than I. I want to put in the first page of it that it is inscribed to Thomas Carlyle. May I?"

Dickens claimed here that he best knew Carlyle's books and that his new novel in all its contents represented the fullest measure of agreement between Carlyle and himself. This claim is certainly worth a short inquiry.

Carlyle has been often called a pessimist, but how is it that he should characterize Bentham and Malthus as "Professors of the Dismal Science"? Perhaps the question can be answered thus. Carlyle did not in the least despair of Life; he only despaired of Man. Life had boundless resources and immense potentialities, but Man had bungled things and proved himself wholly incapable of doing his Duty. Bentham and Malthus, on the other hand, had lost faith in Life itself, because they tried to confine it within strange narrow limits -

individuals should have their minds centred on themselves and their bodies shrunk within themselves. This was what Carlyle would call drying up the Fountains of Life, for it would mean an existence devoid of feeling and compassion and love and sacrifice. He did not believe that faith in the human destiny could sink lower. It was not surprising then that he gave the labours of these thinkers the name that he gave.

Utilitarian Philosophy had been under fire in Carlyle's work ever since Sartor Resartus, and "Professors of the Dismal Science" had figured in a ludicrous light directly or indirectly in almost all his social and political pronouncements. Knowing Carlyle's books as he claimed to know, Dickens must have been hardened in his hostility towards the Utilitarian theory under Carlyle's influence. But some evidence may modify this view a little. Here are a few lines from Hard Times:

> "..... You must use, ... for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste."

This proof-sensing, demonstration-seeking school of thought forms one half of the contrast presented in Hard Times. Its importance can also be judged from the fact that "Prove It" stood second in the list of titles suggested by Dickens, although it appealed more to Forster than to him. It appears that Dickens wanted to smash this proof-demanding philosophy, ironically enough, with a proof furnished by the fancy-loving, wonder-creating philosophy which completed the designed contrast. It is interesting that he satirized this proof-requiring habit of thought in December 1835, in 'The Parlour Orator' in the Sketches:

"We stand, in these times, upon a calm elevation of intellectual attainment, and not in the dark recess of mental deprivation. Proof is what I require - proof, and not assertions, in these stirring times. Every gen'lem'n that knows me, knows what was the nature and effect of my observations, when it was in the contemplation of the Old-street Suburban Representative Discovery Society, to recommend a candidate for that place in Cornwall there - I forget the name of it. 'Mr. Snobee,' said Mr. Wilson, 'is a fit and proper person to represent the borough in Parliament.' 'Prove it,' says I. 'The abolitionist of the national debt, the unflinching opponent of pensions, the uncompromising advocate of the negro, the reducer of sinecures and the duration of Parliaments; the extender of nothing but the suffrages of the people,' says Mr. Wilson. 'Prove it,' says I. 'His acts prove it,' says he. 'Prove <u>them</u>,' says I."

Another point may be of interest here. Most probably Dickens had himself read Bentham, perhaps before he read Carlyle.

Here is Mrs. Gradgrind addressing Louisa:

' "Don't tell me that's the reason, because it can be nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Gradgrind. "Go and be somethingological directly." Mrs. Gradgrind was not a scientific character, and usually dismissed her children to their studies with this general injunction to choose their pursuit.'

It is she again congratulating Louisa:

"However, I give you joy, my dear - and I hope you may now turn all your ological studies to good account, I am sure, I do! ....."

Yet again she but on her death-bed:

' "But there is something - not an Ology at all - that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is ....." '

The point in the satirical coinings "Oology", "Oological", and "Somethingological" may be better realized if they are seen in the context of <u>Deontology</u> or, <u>The Science of Morality</u> which John Bowring arranged and edited from the MSS. of Jeremy Bentham and which was

published in 1834. Bentham finds the existing terms in ethical studies inadequate, and coins 'Deontology' by which he means the knowledge of what is right or proper. He says that Deontology is grounded on the principle of utility and that every action is right or wrong - worthy or unworthy - in proportion to its tendency to contribute to, or to diminish the amount of, public happiness. Further, Deontology or Private Ethics is the science by which happiness is created out of motives extra-legislatorial.

In The Dickens World Humphry House makes some interesting remarks about Elizabeth Gaskell and her Mary Barton in connexion with Hard Times, and says that "there was never any question of a conscious and deliberate imitation of her, or of Carlyle, or of anybody else." He also quotes Dickens to say that he had not meant to write a new story for a year when the idea laid hold of him by the throat in a very violent manner. But he thinks there is no means of knowing what this central idea was.

This 'instance' from Deontology[1] may well be 'this central idea' of Hard Times which has been frequently described as a moral fable:

> 'By a given instance, however, the operation of the different sanctions upon conduct may best be treated.
>
> 'Timothy Thoughtless and Walter Wise are fellow prentices. Thoughtless gave into the vice of drunkenness: Wise abstained from it. Mark the consequence.
>
> '1. Physical sanction. For every debauch, Thoughtless was rewarded by sickness in the head, to recruit himself he lay in bed the next morning, and his whole frame became enervated by relaxation; and when he returned to his work, his work ceased to be a satisfaction to him.

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1. Jeremy Bentham: Deontology, (1834), Vol. I, Chapter VII: "Sanctions", pp. 118-121.

'Walter Wise refused to accompany him to the drinking table. His health had not been originally strong, but it was invigorated by temperance. Increasing strength of body gave increasing zest to every satisfaction he enjoyed: his rest at night was tranquil, his risings in the morning cheerful, his labour pleasurable.

'2. Social sanction. Timothy had a sister, deeply interested in his happiness. She reproved him at first, then neglected, then abandoned him. She had been to him a source of great pleasure - it was all swept away.

'Walter had a brother, who had shown indifference to him. That brother had watched over his conduct, and began to show an interest in his well-being - the interest increased from day to day. At last he became a constant visitor, and a more than common friend, and did a thousand services for his brother, which no other man in the world would have done.

'3. Popular sanctions. Timothy was a member of a club, which had money and reputation. He went thither one day in a state of inebriety, he abused the secretary, and was expelled by an unanimous vote.

'The regular habits of Walter had excited the attention of his master. He said one day to his banker - The young man is fitted for a higher station. The banker bore it in mind, and on the first opportunity, took him into his service. He rose from one distinction to another, and was frequently consulted on business of the highest importance by men of wealth and influence.

'4. Legal sanction. Timothy rushed out from the club whence he had been so ignominiously expelled. He insulted a man in the streets, and walked penniless into the open country. Reckless of every thing, he robbed the first traveller he met; he was apprehended, prosecuted, and sentenced to transportation.

'Walter had been an object of approbation to his fellow-citizens. He was called, by their good opinion, to the magistracy. He reached its highest honours, and even sat in judgment on his fellow apprentice, whom time and misery had so changed that he was not recognised by him.

'5. Religious sanction. In prison, and in the ship which conveyed Timothy to Botany Bay, his mind was alarmed and afflicted with the apprehension of future punishment - an angry and avenging Deity was constantly present in his thoughts, and every day of his existence was embittered by the dread of the Divine Being.

> 'To Walter the contemplation of futurity was peaceful and pleasurable. He dwelt with constant delight on the benign attributes of the Deity, and the conviction was ever present to him that it must be well, that all ultimately must be well, to the virtuous. Great, indeed, was the balance of pleasure which he drew from his existence, and great was the sum of happiness to which he gave birth.'

Perhaps it is not difficult to read the essential features of Hard Times in the above lines. Timothy Thoughtless and Walter Wise suggest Tom and Bitzer, the relations between Timothy and his sister point to those between Tom and Louisa, the 'master' and the 'banker' promise Bounderby, the robbery by Timothy shadows forth that by Tom, the transportation sentence for Timothy anticipates Tom's inevitable flight abroad, and the apprenticeship figuring here forestalls that mentioned by Childers which is so shocking and incomprehensible to Gradgrind and Bounderby.

Again, Dickens's essay, Sunday under Three Heads, was published in 1836 under the pseudonym "Timothy Sparks". Was it - among its fellows, "Boz", "W.P.", and "Tibbs" - a healthy retort to Bentham's "Timothy Thoughtless" or only a coincident contrast? In any case it is highly probable that Dickens read Deontology before he wrote Hard Times.

An extract from Bentham's Introduction to Morals and Legislation may be of further interest. It is quoted in Deontology to give a sharper edge to the question - Are 'the animal tribes' 'susceptible of pain' and can pleasure be communicated to them and is this to be determined by the faculty of reason or of discourse? It runs as follows:

> 'But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison, a more rational, as well as, a more conversible animal than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month old. And suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?'

The horse and the dog play an extremely important role in Hard Times. In fact they form the striking force of the fancy-loving, amusement-giving camp. The horse figures as a graminivorous, quadruped Fact in the schoolroom, as a living, entertaining animal in the circus and as a 'rational', 'conversible' agent in the final Tom-Bitzer scene. The dog is as much there as the horse. It is both the horse and the dog who assist in Tom's escape from Bitzer's trap. Dickens has made a vast improvement upon Bentham's idea by planting these two members of the animal tribes in the field of training and art, so that even a well-finished product of the Fact-machine like Bitzer cannot face 'a full-grown horse or dog'. Mr. Jupe's dog, Merrylegs, symbolizes this 'more rational' and 'more conversible' aspect of 'the animal tribes' and poses the all-significant question - How is it that a dog finds you?

Strangely enough, and perhaps as cruelly, the edifice of Gradgrind Philosophy that Dickens raised, got its foundation-stone from Bentham and the bomb-shell of Sleary Philosophy with which he destroyed it, came from Bentham, too.

Sartor Resartus first appeared in Fraser's Magazine, 1833-4. It was published in a volume first at Boston in March, 1836, and then at

London in June, 1838.

On February 11, 1836, The Morning Chronicle, London, reviewed the first series of Sketches by Boz and on September 24, 1836, it carried on Page 3, (Column 1), a contribution from the author as follows -

SKETCHES BY "BOZ". New Series, No. 1.

Meditations in Monmouth-street.

And here are two relevant extracts from Sartor Resartus[1] -

"'Often, while I sojourned in that monstrous tuberosity of Civilised Life, the Capital of England; and meditated, and questioned Destiny, under that ink-sea of vapour, black, thick, and multifarious as Spartan broth; and was one lone soul amid those grinding millions; often have I turned into their Old-Clothes Market to worship. With awe-struck heart I walk through that Monmouth Street, with its empty Suits, as through a Sanhedrim of Stainless Ghosts. Silent are they, but expressive in their silence: the past witnesses and instruments of Woe and Joy, of Passions, Virtues, Crimes, and all the fathomless tumult of Good and Evil in "the Prison men call Life." Friends! trust not the heart of that man for whom Old Clothes are not venerable. Watch, too, with reverence, that bearded Jewish High-priest, who with hoarse voice, like some Angel of Doom, summons them from the four winds! On his head, like the Pope, he has three Hats, - a real triple tiara; on either hand are the similitude of wings, whereon the summoned Garments come to alight; and ever, as he slowly cleaves the air, sounds forth his deep fateful note, as if through a trumpet he were proclaiming: "Ghosts of Life, come to Judgment!" Reck not, ye fluttering Ghosts: he will purify you in his Purgatory with fire and with water; and, one day, new-created ye shall reappear. O, let him in whom the flame of Devotion is ready to go out, who has never worshipped, and knows not what to worship, pace and repace, with austerest thought, the pavement of Monmouth Street, and say whether his heart and his eyes still continue dry. If Field Lane, with its long fluttering rows of yellow handkerchiefs, be a Dionysius' Ear, where, in stifled jarring hubbub, we hear the Indictment which Poverty and Vice bring against lazy Wealth, that it has left them there cast-out and trodden under foot of Want, Darkness and the Devil, - then is Monmouth Street a Mirza's Hill, where, in motley vision, the whole Pageant of Existence passes awfully before us; with its wail and jubilee,

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1. Bk. III, Ch. VI - "Old Clothes".

mad loves and mad hatreds, church-bells and gallows-ropes, farce-tragedy, beast-god-hood, - the Bedlam of Creation!' "

"At the same time, is it not strange that, in Paper-bag Documents destined for an English work, there exists nothing like an authentic diary of this his sojourn in London, and of his Meditations among the Clothes-shops only the obscurest emblematic shadows? ....."

It is clear that not only for the whole idea of his sketch, "Meditations in Monmouth-street" but for the very title of it, Dickens is directly indebted to Carlyle.

It may perhaps be suggested that Dickens might have read Sartor Resartus in Fraser's Magazine in 1833-4 and that his interest in it was stimulated when he saw it in book-form, because he had himself become a writer by then.

It is perhaps clear that Dickens's first indirect but real contact with Carlyle took place about the middle of 1836. Perhaps the precise date of the delivery of the American edition of Sartor in England can make things more definite.

Appendix B

(p. 80, fn. 1)

Below are given the concluding lines of the opening chapter of Frederick Marryat's Jacob Faithful (1834):

> 'Nothing was burning - not even the curtains to my mother's bed appeared to be singed. I was astonished - breathless, with fear, with a trembling voice, I again called 'Mother'. I remained more than a minute panting for breath, and then ventured to draw back the curtains of the bed - my mother was not there! but there appeared to be a black mass in the centre of the bed. I put my hand fearfully upon it - it was a sort of unctuous, pitchy cinder. I screamed with horror, my little senses reeled, - I staggered from the cabin and fell down on the deck in a state amounting almost to insanity, it was followed by a sort of stupor, which lasted for many hours.
>
> 'As the reader may be in some doubt as to the occasion of my mother's death, I must inform him that she perished in that particular and dreadful manner, which does sometimes, although rarely, occur, to those who indulge in an immoderate use of spiritous liquors. Cases of this kind do indeed present themselves but once in a century, but the occurrence of them is too well authenticated. She perished from what is termed spontaneous combustion, an inflammation of the gases generated from the spirits absorbed into the system. It is to be presumed that the flames issuing from my mother's body, completely frightened out of his senses my father, who had been drinking freely; and thus did I lose both my parents, one by fire and the other by water, at one and the same time.'

The above may well be compared with Dickens's account of Krook's death in Bleak House quoted on p. 195 above.

In his introduction to Jacob Faithful (Constable & Co. Ltd., London) George Saintsbury says Marryat did not defend Spontaneous Combustion as Dickens did in his preface to Bleak House. But had not Marryat defended it in the novel itself? At least the extract above gives that impression.

To all appearance Dickens exploited Spontaneous Combustion first in the Sketches, in 'The Streets - Morning' which appeared in the Evening Chronicle on 21st July, 1835 (a date close to that of Jacob Faithful):

> 'The servant of all work ..... is warned by Master ..... that it's half-past six, whereupon she awakes all of a sudden, with well-feigned astonishment, and goes downstairs very sulkily, wishing, while she strikes a light, that the principle of spontaneous combustion would extend itself to coals and kitchen range.'

However, the symbolic effect with which Dickens used Spontaneous Combustion in Bleak House probably originated from Carlyle's French Revolution (1837):

> 'But what if it were not a swell of the abating kind? There are swells that come of upper tempest and wind-gust. But again there are swells that come of subterranean pent wind, some say; and even of inward decomposition, of decay that has become self-combustion'

> 'Feudalism is struck dead; not on parchment only, and by ink; but in very fact, by fire: say, by self-combustion.'

Appendix C

(p. 159, fn. 3)

In 'Hudson's Statue' (No. VII in Latter-Day Pamphlets published on 1st July, 1850) Carlyle wrote:

> 'Nevertheless, among these dust mountains, with their antiquarian excerpts and sepulchral brasses, it is astonishing what strange fragments you do turn up .....'

Earlier he had written:

> 'he girt himself to the Hercules' task, of removing rubbish-mountains .....'

> 'but to shovel together, or indicate, in huge rubbish-mountains incondite as Chaos.'

Appendix D

(p. 173, fn. 3)

In Past and Present, Bk. II, Ch. II, Carlyle had written:

> 'Alas, what mountains of dead ashes, wreck and burnt bones, does assiduous Pedantry dig up from Past Time, and name it History: till, as we say, the human soul sinks wearied and bewildered; till the Past Time seems all one infinite incredible gray void, without sun, stars, hearth-fires, or candle-light; dim effusive dust-whirlwinds filling universal Nature; and over your Historical Library, it is as if all the Titans had written for themselves: DRY RUBBISH SHOT HERE!'

Carlyle wrote that in 1843, but the ways of the Muse are mysterious. An image or idea may linger for years in the dark chambers of the mind before coming into the light of creation.

Appendix E

(p. 316, fn. 1)

In Carlyle the gig figures frequently as a symbol of respectability:

> 'Could she have driven so much as a brass-bound Gig, or even a simple iron-spring one?' (Sartor Resartus)
>
> 'How silent now sits Royalism; sits all Aristocratism; Respectability that kept its Gig! The honour now, and the safety, is to Poverty, not to Wealth.'
>
> 'all the Gigs of Creation: all, all!'
>
> 'RESPECTABILITY, with all her collected Gigs inflamed for funeral pyre, wailing, leaves the Earth.'
>
> 'For it is the End of the dominion of IMPOSTURE (which is Darkness and opaque Firedamp), and the burning up, with unquenchable fire, of all the Gigs that are on the Earth.' (The French Revolution)

And Dickens mentioned The French Revolution as 'that wonderful book' which he read 'again for the 500th time', and which 'he carried with him wherever he went.'

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

The following list is selective rather than exhaustive, but it is hoped that it adequately represents the material directly connected with the subject of this study.

A. - Dickens's Principal Works:

SUNDAY UNDER THREE HEADS; As it is; as Sabbath Bills would make it; as it might be made (1836).
Published under the pseudonym 'Timothy Sparks'.

SKETCHES BY 'BOZ': Illustrative of every-day life, and every-day people. 2 vols. (1836).
A second series in one volume appeared at the end of 1836, and the whole series in one volume (1839).

THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF THE PICKWICK CLUB containing a faithful record of the perambulations, perils, travels, adventures, and sporting transactions of the corresponding members. Edited by 'Boz' (1837).
All Dickens's novels published in monthly numbers between 1836 and 1866 appeared in twenty parts of 32 pages; numbers XIX and XX, however, were always issued together as a so-called 'double number' of only 48 pages. Pickwick was published from April 1836 to November 1837.

OLIVER TWIST; or, the parish boy's progress. 3 vols. (1838).
First published in Bentley's Miscellany as a monthly serial between February 1837 and March 1839.

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF NICHOLAS NICKLEBY: containing a faithful account of the fortunes, misfortunes, uprisings, downfallings, and complete career of the Nickleby family (1839).
First issued in twenty (as nineteen) monthly parts from April 1838.

MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK. 3 vols. (1840-1).
Originally issued in eighty-eight weekly parts, and also in monthly numbers, from 4 April 1840.

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP (1841).
In the Clock from 25 April 1840.

BARNABY RUDGE: a tale of the riots of 'eighty (1841).
In the Clock from 13 February 1841.

AMERICAN NOTES, for general circulation. 2 vols. (1842)

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT: his relatives, friends, and enemies. Comprising all his wiles and his ways, with an historical record of what he did, and what he didn't; showing, moreover, who inherited the family plate, who came in for the silver spoons, and who for the wooden ladles. The whole forming a complete key to the house of Chuzzlewit (1844).
First issued in twenty (as nineteen) monthly parts from January 1843.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: In prose. Being a ghost story of Christmas (1843).

THE CHIMES: a goblin story of some bells that rang an old year out and a new year in (1844).

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH: a fairy tale of home (1845).

THE BATTLE OF LIFE: a love story (1846).

PICTURES FROM ITALY (1846).
First published in the Daily News between 21 January and 2 March 1846, with some variations, as seven 'Travelling Letters'.

DEALINGS WITH THE FIRM OF DOMBEY AND SON, WHOLESALE, RETAIL, AND FOR EXPORTATION (1848).
First issued in twenty (as nineteen) monthly parts from October 1846.

THE HAUNTED MAN AND THE GHOST'S BARGAIN: a fancy for Christmas time (1848).

THE PERSONAL HISTORY, ADVENTURES, EXPERIENCES, AND OBSERVATION OF DAVID COPPERFIELD THE YOUNGER OF BLUNDERSTONE ROOKERY (Which he never meant to be published on any account) (1850).
First issued in twenty (as nineteen) monthly parts from May 1849.

CHRISTMAS STORIES (1850-67).
Published as part of the Christmas numbers of Household Words and All the Year Round between 1850 and 1867, usually written either in collaboration with Wilkie Collins or in conjunction with other regular contributors.

A CHILD'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND. 3 vols. (1852, 1853, 1854).
First published in Household Words between 25 January 1851 and 10 December 1853.

BLEAK HOUSE (1853).
First issued in twenty (as nineteen) monthly parts, from March 1852.

HARD TIMES: For these times (1854).
First published in Household Words in weekly instalments from 1 April to 12 August.

LITTLE DORRIT (1857).
First issued in twenty (as nineteen) monthly parts from December 1855.

THE LAZY TOUR OF TWO IDLE APPRENTICES (1857).
In collaboration with Wilkie Collins. First published in Household Words 3 October to 31 October 1857.

REPRINTED PIECES (1858).
Consists of thirty-one articles contributed to Household Words.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES (1859).
First published in All the Year Round in weekly instalments from 30 April to 26 November.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS. 3 vols. (1861).
First published in All the Year Round in weekly instalments from 1 December 1860 to 3 August 1861.

THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER (1861).
A series of essays from All the Year Round;

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND. 2 vols. (1865).
First issued in twenty (as nineteen) monthly parts from May 1864.

THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD (1870).
Unfinished at Dickens's death. First issued in six monthly parts from April to September 1870; originally designed to be completed in twelve.

THE LIFE OF OUR LORD: Written expressly for his children by Charles Dickens (1934).

(Note:

(i) The present study has generally followed the Macmillan edition of Dickens's works.

(ii) Starting as a reporter for The Mirror of Parliament and the True Sun in 1832, in time Dickens came to be associated with the Morning Chronicle, Bentley's Miscellany, the Daily News, Household Words and All the Year Round. He was the editor and major share-holder of All the Year Round till his death in 1870.

(iii) Most of the MSS. of the novels are in the Forster Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. There are other major MSS. collections in the Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York, and the Henry E. Huntingdon Library, San Marino, California.)

THE LETTERS OF CHARLES DICKENS: edited by W. Dexter, 3 vols. (1938), the best and fullest edition published so far.

LETTERS FROM CHARLES DICKENS TO ANGELA BURDETT-COUTTS, 1841-1865: selected and edited by Edgar Johnson (London, 1953).

(Note:

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